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S E R M O N S,

BY

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TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

*A SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE LIFE AND CHARACTER
OF THE AUTHOR,*

By JAMES FINLAYSON, D.D.

A NEW EDITION,

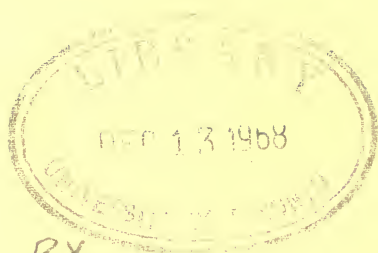
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SERMON I.

On the IMPORTANCE of ORDER in
CONDUCT.

1 CORINTH. xiv. 40.

Let all things be done—in order.

RELIGION, like every regular and well-conducted system, is composed of a variety of parts; each of which possesses its separate importance, and contributes to the perfection of the whole. Some graces are essential to it; such as faith and repentance, the love of God, and the love of our neighbour; which, for that reason, must be often inculcated on men. There are other dispositions

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and habits, which, though they hold not so high a rank, yet are necessary to the introduction and support of the former ; and therefore, in religious exhortations, these also justly claim a place. Of this nature is that regard to order, method, and regularity, which the apostle enjoins us in the Text to carry through the whole of life. Whether you consider it as, in itself, a moral duty, or not, yet I hope soon to convince you that it is essential to the proper discharge of almost all duties, and merits, upon that account, a greater degree of attention than is commonly paid to it in a religious view.

If you look abroad into the world, you may be satisfied at the first glance, that a vicious and libertine life is always a life of confusion. Thence it is natural to infer, that order is friendly to religion. As the neglect of it coincides with vice, so the preservation of it must assist virtue. By the appointment of Providence, it is indispensably requisite to worldly prosperity. Thence arises a presumption, that it is connected also with
spiritual



spiritual improvement. When you behold a man's affairs, through negligence and misconduct, involved in disorder, you naturally conclude that his ruin approaches. You may at the same time justly suspect, that the causes which affect his temporal welfare, operate also to the prejudice of his moral interests. The apostle teaches us in this chapter, that *God is not the author of confusion*. He is a lover of order; and all his works are full of order. But, *where confusion is, there is, its close attendant, every evil work*. In the sequel of this Discourse I shall point out some of those parts of conduct wherein it is most material to virtue that order take place; and then shall conclude with showing the high advantages which attend it. Allow me to recommend to you, order in the conduct of your affairs; order in the distribution of your time; order in the management of your fortune; order in the regulation of your amusements; order in the arrangement of your society. Thus *let all things be done in order*.

Ver. 33.

James, iii.
16.

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I. MAINTAIN order in the conduct of your worldly affairs. Every man, in every station of life, has some concerns, private, domestic, or public, which require successive attention; he is placed in some sphere of active duty. Let the employments which belong to that sphere be so arranged, that each may keep its place without justling another; and that which regards the world, may not interfere with what is due to God. In proportion to the multiplicity of affairs, the observance of order becomes more indispensable. But scarcely is there any train of life so simple and uniform, but what will suffer through the neglect of it. I speak not now of suffering in point of worldly interest. I call upon you to attend to higher interests; to remember that the orderly conduct of your temporal affairs, forms a great part of your duty as Christians.

Many, indeed, can hardly be persuaded of this truth. A strong propensity has, in every age, appeared among men, to sequester religion from
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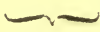
the commerce of the world. Seasons of retreat and devotion they are, willing to appropriate to God. But the world they consider as their own province. They carry on a sort of separate interest there. Nay, by the respect which, on particular occasions, they pay to religion, they too often imagine that they have acquired the liberty of acting in worldly matters, according to what plan they choose. How entirely do such persons mistake the design of Christianity! — In this world you are placed by Providence as on a great field of trial. By the necessities of your nature, you are called forth to different employments. By many ties, you are connected with human society. From superiours and inferiours, from neighbours and equals, from friends and enemies, demands arise, and obligations circulate through all the ranks of life. This active scene was contrived by the wisdom of Heaven, on purpose that it might bring into exercise all the virtues of the Christian character; your justice, candour, and veracity, in dealing with one

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another ; your fidelity to every trust, and your conscientious discharge of every office which is committed to you ; your affection for your friends ; your forgiveness of enemies ; your charity to the distressed ; your attention to the interests of your family. It is by fulfilling all these obligations, in proper succession, that you show *your conversation to be such as becometh the gospel of Christ*. It is thus you make *your light so to shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*. It is thus you are rendered *meet for the inheritance of the saints in light*.—But how can those various duties be discharged by persons who are ever in that hurry and perplexity which disorder creates ? You wish, perhaps, to perform what your character and station require. But from the confusion in which you have allowed yourselves to be involved, you find it to have become impossible. What was neglected to be done in its proper place, thrusts itself forward at an inconvenient season. A multitude of affairs crowd upon you together. Different obligations

ligations distract you ; and this distraction is sometimes the cause, sometimes the pretence, of equally neglecting them all, or, at least, of sacrificing the greater to the lesser.

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Hence arise so many inconsistent characters, and such frequent instances of partial and divided goodness, as we find in the world ; appearances of generosity without justice, honour without truth, probity to men without reverence of God. He who conducts his affairs with method and regularity, meets every duty in its proper place, and assigns it its due rank. But where there is no order in conduct, there can be no uniformity in character. The natural connection and arrangement of duties are lost. If virtue appear at all, it will only be in fits and starts. The authority of conscience may occasionally operate, when our situation affords it room for exertion. But in other circumstances of equal importance, every moral sentiment will be overpowered by the tumultuous bustle of worldly affairs. Fretfulness of temper, too, will generally characterise

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those who are negligent of order. The hurry in which they live, and the embarrassments with which they are surrounded, keep their spirits in perpetual ferment. Conflicting with difficulties which they are unable to overcome, conscious of their own misconduct, but ashamed to confess it, they are engaged in many a secret struggle; and the uneasiness which they suffer within, recoils in bad humour on all who are around them. Hence the wretched resources to which, at last, they are obliged to fly, in order to quiet their cares. In despair of being able to unravel what they have suffered to become so perplexed, they sometimes sink into supine indolence, sometimes throw themselves into the arms of intemperance and loose pleasure; by either of which they aggravate their guilt, and accelerate their ruin. To the end that order may be maintained in your affairs, it is necessary,

II. THAT you attend to order in the distribution of your time. Time you ought to consider as a sacred trust committed

mitted to you by God, of which you are now the depositaries, and are to render account at the last. That portion of it which he has allotted you, is intended partly for the concerns of this world, partly for those of the next. Let each of these occupy, in the distribution of your time, that space which properly belongs to it. Let not the hours of hospitality and pleasure interfere with the discharge of your necessary affairs; and let not what you call necessary affairs, encroach upon the time which is due to devotion. *To every thing there is a season, and a time for every purpose under the heaven.* If you delay till to-morrow what ought to be done to-day, you overcharge the morrow with a burden which belongs not to it. You load the wheels of time, and prevent it from carrying you along smoothly. He who every morning plans the transactions of the day, and follows out that plan, carries on a thread which will guide him through the labyrinth of the

Eccles.iii.1

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the most busy life. The orderly arrangement of his time is like a ray of light which darts itself through all his affairs. But where no plan is laid, where the disposal of time is surrendered merely to the chance of incidents, all things lie huddled together in one chaos, which admits neither of distribution nor review.

The first requisite for introducing order into the management of time, is to be impressed with a just sense of its value. Consider well how much depends upon it, and how fast it flies away. The bulk of men are in nothing more capricious and inconsistent than in their appretiation of time. When they think of it as the measure of their continuance on earth, they highly prize it, and with the greatest anxiety seek to lengthen it out. But when they view it in separate parcels, they appear to hold it in contempt, and squander it with inconsiderate profusion. While they complain that life is short, they are often wishing its different periods at an end. Covetous of every other possession, of
time

time only they are prodigal. They allow every idle man to be master of this property, and make every frivolous occupation welcome that can help them to consume it. Among those who are so careless of time, it is not to be expected that order should be observed in its distribution. But, by this fatal neglect, how many materials of severe and lasting regret are they laying up in store for themselves! The time which they suffer to pass away in the midst of confusion, bitter repentance seeks afterwards in vain to recal. What was omitted to be done at its proper moment, arises to be the torment of some future season. Manhood is disgraced by the consequences of neglected youth. Old age, oppressed by cares that belonged to a former period, labours under a burden not its own. At the close of life, the dying man beholds with anguish that his days are finishing, when his preparation for eternity is hardly commenced. Such are the effects of a disorderly waste of time, through not attending to its value. Every thing in the life of such persons is misplaced.

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misplaced. Nothing is performed aright, from not being performed in due season.

But he who is orderly in the distribution of his time, takes the proper method of escaping those manifold evils. He is justly said to *redeem the time*. By proper management he prolongs it. He lives much in little space ; more in a few years than others do in many. He can live to God and his own soul, and at the same time attend to all the lawful interests of the present world. He looks back on the past, and provides for the future. He catches and arrests the hours as they fly. They are marked down for useful purposes, and their memory remains. Whereas those hours fleet by the man of confusion like a shadow. His days and years are either blanks, of which he has no remembrance, or they are filled up with such a confused and irregular succession of unfinished transactions, that though he remembers he has been busy, yet he can give no account of the business which has employed him. Of him, more than of any other, it may with justice be pronounced, that

*that he walketh in a vain shew ; he is dis-
quieted in vain.*

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III. INTRODUCE order into the management of your fortune. Whatever it be, let the administration of it proceed with method and œconomy. From time to time examine your situation ; and proportion your expence to your growing or diminishing revenue. Provide what is necessary, before you indulge in what is superfluous. Study to do justice to all with whom you deal, before you affect the praise of liberality. In a word, fix such a plan of living as you find that your circumstances will fairly admit, and adhere to it invariably against every temptation to improper excess.

No admonition respecting morals is more necessary than this, to the age in which we live ; an age manifestly distinguished by a propensity to thoughtless profusion ; wherein all the different ranks of men are observed to press with forward vanity on those who are above them ; to vie with their superiours in every
mode

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mode of luxury and ostentation ; and to seek no farther argument for justifying extravagance, than the fashion of the times, and the supposed necessity of living like others around them. This turn of mind begets contempt for sober and orderly plans of life. It overthrows all regard to domestic concerns and duties. It pushes men on to hazardous and visionary schemes of gain ; and unfortunately unites the two extremes of grasping with rapaciousness, and of squandering with profusion. In the midst of such disorder, no prosperity can be of long continuance. While confusion grows upon men's affairs, and prodigality at the same time wastes their substance, poverty makes its advances *like an armed man*. They tremble at the view of the approaching evil ; but have lost the force of mind to make provision against it. Accustomed to move in a round of society and pleasures disproportioned to their condition, they are unable to break through the enchantments of habit ; and with their eyes open sink into the gulph which is before them. Poverty enforces dependence ;
and

and dependence increases corruption. Necessity first betrays them into mean compliances; next, impels them to open crimes; and, beginning with ostentation and extravagance, they end in infamy and guilt. Such are the consequences of neglecting order in our worldly circumstances. Such is the circle in which the profuse and the dissolute daily run.—To what cause, so much as to the want of order, can we attribute those scenes of distress which so frequently excite our pity; families that once were flourishing reduced to ruin; and the melancholy widow and neglected orphan thrown forth, friendless, upon the world? What cause has been more fruitful in engendering those atrocious crimes which fill society with disquiet and terror; in training the gamester to fraud, the robber to violence, and even the assassin to blood?

Be assured, then, that order, frugality, and œconomy, are the necessary supports of every personal and private virtue. How humble soever these qualities may appear to some, they are, nevertheless, the basis
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on which liberty, independence, and true honour, must rise. He who has the steadiness to arrange his affairs with method and regularity, and to conduct his train of life agreeably to his circumstances, can be master of himself in every situation into which he may be thrown. He is under no necessity to flatter or to lie, to stoop to what is mean, or to commit what is criminal. But he who wants that firmness of mind which the observance of order requires, is held in bondage to the world; he can neither act his part with courage as a man, nor with fidelity as a Christian. From the moment you have allowed yourselves to pass the line of œconomy, and live beyond your fortune, you have entered on the path of danger. Precipices surround you on all sides. Every step which you take may lead to mischiefs, that, as yet, lie hidden; and to crimes that will end in your everlasting perdition.

IV. OBSERVE order in your amusements; that is, allow them no more than their proper place; study to keep them
within

within due bounds; mingle them in a temperate succession with serious duties, and the higher business of life. Human life cannot proceed to advantage without some measure of relaxation and entertainment. We require relief from care. We are not formed for a perpetual stretch of serious thought. By too intense and continued application, our feeble powers would soon be worn out. At the same time, from our propensity to ease and pleasure, amusement proves, among all ranks of men, the most dangerous foe to order. For it tends incessantly to usurp and encroach, to widen its territories, to thrust itself into the place of more important concerns, and thereby to disturb and counteract the natural course of things. One frivolous amusement indulged out of season, will often carry perplexity and confusion through a long succession of affairs.

Amusements, therefore, though they be of an innocent kind, require steady government, to keep them within a due and limited province. But such as are of an

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irregular and vicious nature, are not to be governed, but to be banished from every orderly society. As soon as a man seeks his happiness from the gaming-table, the midnight revel, and the other haunts of licentiousness, confusion seizes upon him as its own. There will no longer be order in his family, nor order in his affairs, nor order in his time. The most important concerns of life are abandoned. Even the order of nature is by such persons inverted; night is changed into day, and day into night. Character, honour, and interest itself, are trampled under foot. You may with certainty prognosticate the ruin of these men to be just at hand. Disorder, arisen to its height, has nearly accomplished its work. The spots of death are upon them. Let every one who would escape the pestilential contagion, fly with haste from their company.

V. PRESERVE order in the arrangement of your society; that is, entangle not yourselves in a perpetual and promiscuous

miscuous crowd ; select with prudence and propriety those with whom you choose to associate ; let company and retreat succeed each other at measured intervals. There can be no order in his life, who allots not a due share of his time to retirement and reflection. He can neither prudently arrange his temporal affairs, nor properly attend to his spiritual interests. He lives not to himself, but to the world. By continual dissipation, he is rendered giddy and thoughtless. He unavoidably contracts from the world, that spirit of disorder and confusion which is so prevalent in it.

It is not a sufficient preservative against this evil, that the circles of society in which you are engaged are not of a libertine and vicious kind. If they withdraw you from that attention to yourselves, and your domestic concerns, which becomes a good man, they are subversive of order, and inconsistent with duty. What is innocent in itself, degenerates into guilt from being carried to excess ; an idle, trifling society is near akin to

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such

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such as is corrupting: One of the first principles of order is, to learn to be happy at home. It is in domestic retreat that every wise and virtuous man finds his chief satisfaction. It is there he forms the plans which regulate his public conduct. He who knows not how to enjoy himself when alone, can never be long happy abroad. To his vacant mind, company may afford a temporary relief; but when forced to return to himself, he will be so much more oppressed and languid. Whereas, by a due mixture of public and private life, we keep free from the snares of both, and enjoy each to greater advantage.

WHEN we review those different parts of behaviour to which I have shewn that order is essential, it must necessarily occur to you, that they are all mutually connected, and hang upon each other. Throughout your affairs, your time, your expence, your amusements, your society, the principle of order must be equally carried, if you expect to reap any of its happy fruits.

For if into any one of those great departments of life you suffer disorder to enter, it will spread through all the rest. In vain, for instance, you purpose to be orderly in the conduct of your affairs, if you be irregular in the distribution of your time. In vain you attempt to regulate your expence, if into your amusements, or your society, disorder has crept. You have admitted a principle of confusion which will defeat all your plans ; and perplex and entangle what you sought to arrange. Uniformity is above all things necessary to order. If you desire that any thing should proceed according to method and rule, let *all things*, as the Text exhorts, *be done in order*.

I must also admonish you, that in small as well as in great affairs, a due regard to order is requisite. I mean not that you ought to look on those minute attentions which are apt to occupy frivolous minds, as connected either with virtue or wisdom. But I exhort you to remember, that disorder, like other immoralities, frequently takes rise from incon-

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siderable

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siderable beginnings. They who, in the lesser transactions of life, are totally negligent of rule, will be in hazard of extending that negligence, by degrees, to such affairs and duties as will render them criminal. Remissness grows on all who study not to guard against it; and it is only by frequent exercise, that the habits of order and punctuality can be thoroughly confirmed.

FROM what has been said, the great importance of this principle to moral and religious conduct must already be evident. Let us, however, conclude with taking a summary view of the advantages which attend it.

First, the observance of order serves to correct that negligence which makes you omit some duties, and that hurry and precipitancy which make you perform others imperfectly. Your attention is thereby directed to its proper objects. You follow the straight path which Providence has pointed out to man; in the course of which all the different business
of

of life presents itself regularly to him on every side. God and man, time and eternity, possess their proper stations, arise in succession to his view, and attract his care. Whereas he who runs on in a disorderly course, speedily involves himself in a labyrinth, where he is surrounded with intricacy and darkness. The crooked paths into which he strikes, turn him aside from the proper line of human pursuit; hide from his sight the objects which he ought chiefly to regard, and bring others under his view, which serve no purpose but to distract and mislead him.

Next, by attending to order, you avoid idleness, that most fruitful source of crimes and evils. Acting upon a plan, meeting every thing in its own place, you constantly find innocent and useful employment for time. You are never at a loss how to dispose of your hours, or to fill up life agreeably. In the course of human action, there are two extremes equally dangerous to virtue; the multiplicity of affairs, and the total want of

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them.

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them. The man of order stands in the middle between these two extremes, and suffers from neither. He is occupied, but not oppressed. Whereas the disorderly, overloading one part of time, and leaving another vacant, are at one period overwhelmed with business, and at another, either idle through want of employment, or indolent through perplexity. Those seasons of indolence and idleness, which recur so often in their life, are their most dangerous moments. The mind, unhappy in its situation, and clinging to every object which can occupy or amuse it, is then aptest to throw itself into the arms of every vice and every folly.

Farther; by the preservation of order, you check inconstancy and levity. Fickle by nature is the human heart. It is fond of change; and perpetually tends to start aside from the straight line of conduct. Hence arises the propriety of bringing ourselves under subjection to method and rule; which, though at first it may prove constraining, yet by degrees,
and

and from the experience of its happy effects, becomes natural and agreeable. It rectifies those irregularities of temper and manners to which we give the name of caprice ; and which are distinguishing characteristics of a disorderly mind. It is the parent of steadiness of conduct. It forms consistency of character. It is the ground of all the confidence we repose in one another. For, the disorderly we know not where to find. In him only can we place any trust who is uniform and regular ; who lives by principle, not by humour ; who acts upon a plan, and not by desultory motions.

The advantages of order hitherto mentioned belong to rectitude of conduct. Consider also how important it is to your self-enjoyment and felicity. Order is the source of peace ; and peace is the highest of all temporal blessings. Order is indeed the only region in which tranquillity dwells. The very mention of confusion imports disturbance and vexation. Is it possible for that man to be happy, who cannot look into the state of his
affairs,

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affairs, or the tenour of his conduct, without discerning all to be embroiled ; who is either in the midst of remorse for what he has neglected to do, or in the midst of hurry to overtake what he finds, too late, was necessary to have been done ? Such as live according to order, may be compared to the celestial bodies, which move in regular courses, and by stated laws ; whose influence is beneficent ; whose operations are quiet and tranquil. The disorderly resemble those tumultuous elements on earth, which, by sudden and violent irruptions, disturb the course of nature. By mismanagement of affairs, by excess in expence, by irregularity in the indulgence of company and amusement, they are perpetually creating molestation both to themselves and others. They depart from their road to seek pleasure ; and instead of it, they every where raise up sorrows. Being always found out of their proper place, they of course interfere and jar with others. The disorders which they raise never fail to spread beyond their own line, and to involve many
in

in confusion and distress; whence they necessarily become the authors of tumult and contention, of discord and enmity. Whereas order is the foundation of union. It allows every man to carry on his own affairs without disturbing his neighbour. It is the golden chain, which holds together the societies of men in friendship and peace.

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In fine, the man of order is connected with all the higher powers and principles in the universe. He is the follower of God. He walks with him, and acts upon his plan. His character is formed on the spirit which religion breathes. For religion in general, and the religion of Christ in particular, may be called the great discipline of order. To *walk sinfully*, and to *walk disorderly*, are synonymous terms in Scripture. From *such as walk disorderly*, we are commanded, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to *withdraw ourselves*. The kingdom of Satan is the reign of disorder and darkness. To restore order among the works of God, was the end for which the Son of

2 Thess.
iii. 6.

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of God descended to the earth. He requires order to be observed in his church. His undertaking is to be consummated in that perfect order which he shall introduce at the last day. In the *new earth and the new heavens*, undisturbed order shall for ever prevail among the *spirits of the just made perfect*; and whatever farther preparation may be requisite for our being admitted to join their society, it is certain that we shall never share in it, unless we make it now our study to *do all things decently, and in order.*

SERMON II.

On the GOVERNMENT of the HEART.

PROVERBS, iv. 23.

Keep thy heart with all diligence ; for out of it are the issues of life.

AMONG the many wise counsels given by this inspired writer, there is none which deserves greater regard than that contained in the Text. Its importance, however, is too seldom perceived by the generality of men. They are apt to consider the regulation of external conduct as the chief object of religion. If they can act their part with decency, and maintain a fair character, they conceive their duty to be fulfilled. What passes

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II.

passes in the mean time within their mind, they suppose to be of no great consequence, either to themselves, or to the world. In opposition to this dangerous plan of morality, the wise man exhorts us *to keep the heart*; that is, to attend not only to our actions, but to our thoughts and desires; and *keep the heart with all diligence*; that is, with sedulous and unremitting care; for which he assigns this reason, that *out of the heart are the issues of life*.—In discoursing on this subject I purpose to consider, separately, the government of the thoughts, of the passions, and of the temper. But before entering on any of these, let us begin with inquiring, in what sense *the issues of life* are said to be *out of the heart*; that we may discern the force of the argument which the Text suggests, to recommend this great duty of *keeping the heart*.

The issues of life are justly said to be out of the heart, because the state of the heart is what determines our moral character,

character, and what forms our chief happiness or misery.

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First, It is the state of the heart which determines our moral character. The tenour of our actions will always correspond to the dispositions that prevail within. To dissemble, or to suppress them, is a fruitless attempt. In spite of our efforts, they will perpetually break forth in our behaviour. On whatever side the weight of inclination hangs, it will draw the practice after it. In vain therefore you study to preserve your hands clean, unless you resolve at the same time to keep your heart pure. *Make the tree good, as our Saviour directs, and then its fruits will be good also.* For out of the heart proceed not only *evil thoughts*, but *murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.* If that fountain be once poisoned, you can never expect that salubrious streams will flow from it. Throughout the whole of their course, they will carry the taint of the parent spring.

Matth. xv.
19.

But it is not merely from its influence on external action that the importance of

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of the heart to our moral character arises. Independent of all action, it is, in truth, the state of the heart itself which forms our character in the sight of God. With our fellow-creatures, actions must ever hold the chief rank; because, by these only we can judge of one another; by these we effect each other's welfare; and therefore to these alone the regulation of human law extends. But in the eye of that Supreme Being, to whom our whole internal frame is uncovered, dispositions hold the place of actions; and it is not so much what we perform, as the motive which moves us to performance, that constitutes us good or evil in his sight. Even among men, the morality of actions is estimated by the principle from which they are judged to proceed; and such as the principle is, such is the man accounted to be. One, for instance, may spend much of his fortune in charitable actions; and yet, if he is believed to be influenced by mere ostentation, he is deemed not charitable, but vain. He may labour unweariedly to
serve

serve the public; but if he is prompted by the desire of rising into power, he is held not public-spirited, but ambitious; and if he bestows a benefit, purely that he may receive a greater in return, no man would reckon him generous, but selfish and interested. If reason thus clearly teaches us to estimate the value of actions by the dispositions which give them birth, it is an obvious conclusion, that, according to those dispositions, we are all ranked and classed by him who seeth into every heart. The rectification of our principles of action, is the primary object of religious discipline; and, in proportion as this is more or less advanced, we are more or less religious. Accordingly, the regeneration of the heart is every where represented in the Gospel as the most essential requisite in the character of a Christian.

—SECONDLY, The state of the heart not only determines our moral character, but forms our principal happiness or misery. External situations of fortune are no farther of consequence, than as they operate

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on the heart; and their operation there is far from corresponding to the degree of worldly prosperity or adversity. If, from any internal cause, a man's peace of mind be disturbed, in vain you load him with all the honours or riches which the world can bestow. They remain without, like things at a distance from him. They reach not the source of enjoyment. Discomposed thoughts, agitated passions, and a ruffled temper, poison every ingredient of pleasure which the world holds out; and overcast every object which presents itself, with a melancholy gloom. In order to acquire a capacity of happiness, it must be our first study to rectify such inward disorders. Whatever discipline tends to accomplish this purpose, is of greater importance to man, than the acquisition of the advantages of fortune. These are precarious, and doubtful in their effect; internal tranquillity is a certain good. These are only means; but that is the end. These are no more than instruments of satisfaction; that is, satisfaction itself.

Justly

Justly it is said by the Wise Man, that *he who hath no rule over his spirit, is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.* All is waste; all is in disorder and ruins within him. He possesses no defence against dangers of any sort. He lies open to every insurrection of ill-humour, and every invasion of distress. Whereas he who is employed in regulating his mind, is making provision against all the accidents of life. He is erecting a fortress, into which, in the day of danger, he can retreat with safety. And hence, amidst those endeavours to secure happiness which incessantly employ the life of man, the careful regulation, or the improvident neglect of the inward frame, forms the chief distinction between wisdom and folly.

Thus it appears with how much propriety the *issues of life* are said to be *out of the heart*. Here rise those great springs of human conduct whence the main currents flow of our virtue, or our vice; of our happiness, or our misery. Besides this powerful argument for keep-

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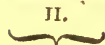
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ing the heart with all diligence, I must mention another important consideration taken from the present state of human nature. 'Think what your heart now is, and what must be the consequence of remitting your vigilance in watching over it. With too much justice it is said in Scripture, to be *deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*. Its bias of innate corruption gives it a perpetual tendency downwards into vice and disorder. To direct and impel it upwards, requires a constant effort. Experience may convince you, that almost every desire has a propensity to wander into an improper direction; that every passion tends to excess; and that around your imagination there perpetually crowds a whole swarm of vain and corrupting thoughts. After all the care that can be bestowed by the best men on the regulation of the heart, it frequently baffles their efforts to keep it under proper discipline. Into what universal tumult then must it rise, if no vigilance be employed, and no government be exercised over it? Inattention and remissness are all that the great adversary

adversary of mankind desires, in order to gain full advantage. While you *sleep*, he *sows his tares in the field*. The house which he finds vacant and unguarded, he presently *garnishes with evil spirits*.

Add to this, that the human temper is to be considered as a system, the parts of which have a mutual dependence on each other. Introduce disorder into any one part, and you derange the whole. Suffer but one passion to go out of its place, or to acquire an unnatural force, and presently the balance of the soul will be broken; its powers will jar among themselves, and their operations become discordant.—*Keep thy heart, therefore, with all diligence*; for all thy diligence is here required. And though thine own keeping alone will not avail, unless the assistance of a higher power concur, yet of this be well assured, that no aid from heaven is to be expected, if thou shalt neglect to exert thyself in performing the part assigned thee.



HAVING now shown the importance of exercising government over the heart, I proceed to consider more particularly in what the government consists, as it respects the thoughts, the passions, and the temper.

I begin with the thoughts, which are the prime movers of the whole human conduct. All that makes a figure on the great theatre of the world, the employments of the busy, the enterprises of the ambitious, and the exploits of the warlike, the virtues which form the happiness, and the crimes which occasion the misery of mankind, originate in that silent and secret recess of thought which is hidden from every human eye. The secrecy and silence which reign there, favour the prejudice, entertained by too many, that thought is exempted from all control. Passions, they perhaps admit, require government and restraint, because they are violent emotions, and disturb society. But with their thoughts, they plead, no one is concerned. By these,

as long as they remain in their bosom, no offence can be given, and no injury committed. To enjoy unrestrained the full range of imagination, appears to them the native right and privilege of man.

Had they to do with none but their fellow-creatures, such reasoning might be specious. But they ought to remember, that in the sight of the Supreme Being, thoughts bear the character of good or evil as much as actions; and that they are, in especial manner, the subjects of Divine jurisdiction, because they are cognizable at no other tribunal. The moral regulation of our thoughts, is the particular test of our reverence for God. If we restrain our passions from breaking forth into open disorders, while we abandon our imagination in secret to corruption, we show that virtue rests with us upon regard to men; and that however we may act a part in public with propriety, there is before our eyes no fear of that God who *searcheth the heart*, and *requireth truth in the inward parts*.

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But, even abstracting from this awful consideration, the government of our thoughts must appear to be of high consequence, from their direct influence on conduct. It is plain, that thought gives the first impulse to every principle of action. Actions are, in truth, no other than thoughts ripened into consistency and substance. So certain is this, that to judge with precision of the character of any man, and to foretel with confidence what part he will act, no more were requisite, than to be rendered capable of viewing the current of thought which passes most frequently within him. Though by such a method we have no access to judge of one another, yet thus it is always in our power to judge of ourselves. Each of us, by impartially scrutinizing his indulged and favourite thoughts, may discover the whole secret of his real character. This consideration alone is sufficient to show of what importance the government of thought is to the *keeping of the heart*.

BUT,

BUT, supposing us convinced of its importance, a question may arise, How far it is within our power, and in what degree thoughts are subject to the command of the will? It is plain that they are not always the offspring of choice. Often they are inevitably impressed upon the mind by surrounding objects. Often they start up, as of themselves, without any principle of introduction which we are able to trace. *As the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth,* equally rapid in its transitions, and inscrutable in its progress, is the course of thought. Moving along a train of connections which are too delicate for our observation, it defeats all endeavours either to explore or to stop its path. Hence vain and fantastic imaginations sometimes break in upon the most settled attention, and disturb even the devout exercises of pious minds. Instances of this sort must be placed to the account of human frailty. They are misfortunes to be deplored, rather than crimes to be condemned ;

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condemned; and our gracious Creator, who *knows our frame, and remembers we are dust*, will not be severe in marking every such error, and wandering of the mind. But, after these allowances are made, still there remains much scope for the proper government of thought; and a multitude of cases occur, in which we are no less accountable for what we think than for what we do.

As, first, when the introduction of any train of thought depends upon ourselves, and is our voluntary act; by turning our attention towards such objects, awakening such passions, or engaging in such employments, as we know must give a peculiar determination to our thoughts. Next, when thoughts, by whatever accident they may have been originally suggested, are indulged with deliberation and complacency. Though the mind has been passive in their reception, and therefore free from blame; yet, if it be active in their continuance, the guilt becomes its own. They may have intruded at first, like unbidden guests; but if, when entered,

tered, they are made welcome, and kindly entertained, the case is the same as if they had been invited from the beginning. If we be thus accountable to God for thoughts either voluntarily introduced, or deliberately indulged, we are no less so, in the last place, for those which find admittance into our hearts from supine negligence, from total relaxation of attention, from allowing our imagination to rove with entire licence, *like the eyes of the fool, towards the ends of the earth.* Our minds are, in this case, thrown open to folly and vanity. They are prostituted to every evil thing which pleases to take possession. The consequences must all be charged to our account; and in vain we plead excuse from human infirmity. Hence it appears, that the great object at which we are to aim in governing our thoughts, is, to take the most effectual measures for preventing the introduction of such as are sinful, and for hastening their expulsion, if they shall have introduced themselves without consent of the will.

But

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But when we descend into our breasts, and examine how far we have studied to keep this object in view, who can tell *how oft he hath offended?* In no article of religion or morals are men more culpably remiss, than in the unrestrained indulgence they give to fancy; and that too, for most part, without remorse. Since the time that Reason began to exert her powers, 'Thought, during our waking hours, has been active in every breast, without a moment's suspension or pause. The current of ideas has been always flowing. The wheels of the spiritual engine have circulated with perpetual motion. Let me ask, what has been the fruit of this incessant activity with the greatest part of mankind? Of the innumerable hours that have been employed in thought, how few are marked with any permanent or useful effect! How many have either passed away in idle dreams; or have been abandoned to anxious discontented musings, to unsocial and malignant passions, or to irregular and criminal desires! Had I power to lay open that storehouse of iniquity,

quity, which the hearts of too many conceal; could I draw out and read to them a list of all the imaginations they have devised, and all the passions they have indulged in secret; what a picture of men would I present to themselves! What crimes would they appear to have perpetrated in fancy, which to their most intimate companions they durst not reveal!

Even when men imagine their thoughts to be innocently employed, they too commonly suffer them to run out into extravagant imaginations, and chimerical plans of what they could wish to attain, or choose to be, if they could frame the course of things according to their desire. Though such employments of fancy come not under the same description with those which are plainly criminal, yet wholly unblameable they seldom are. Besides the waste of time which they occasion, and the misapplication which they indicate of those intellectual powers that were given to us for much nobler purposes, such romantic speculations lead us always into the neighbourhood of forbidden

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den regions. They place us on dangerous ground. They are for the most part connected with some one bad passion; and they always nourish a giddy and frivolous turn of thought. They unfit the mind for applying with vigour to rational pursuits, or for acquiescing in sober plans of conduct. From that ideal world in which it allows itself to dwell, it returns, to the commerce of men, unbent and relaxed, sickly and tainted, averse from discharging the duties, and sometimes disqualified even for relishing the pleasures of ordinary life. *O Jerusalem! wash thine heart from wickedness. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?*—In order to guard against all such corruption and abuses of thought as I have mentioned, it may be profitable to attend to the following rules:

Jer. iv. 15.

IN the first place, study to acquire the habit of attention to thought. No study is more important, for in proportion to the degree in which this habit is possessed, such commonly is the degree of intellectual

tellectual improvement. It is the power of attention which in a great measure distinguishes the wise and the great from the vulgar and trifling herd of men. The latter are accustomed to think, or rather to dream, without knowing the subject of their thoughts. In their unconnected roving, they pursue no end; they follow no track. Every thing floats loose and disjointed on the surface of their mind; like leaves scattered and blown about on the face of the waters.

In order to lead your thoughts into any useful direction, your first care must be, to acquire the power of fixing them, and of restraining their irregular motions. Inure yourselves to form a plan of proper meditation; to pursue it steadily; and with severe authority to keep the door shut against intrusions of wandering fancy. Let your mind, for this purpose, become a frequent object to itself. Let your thoughts be made the subject of thought and review.—“To what is my attention at present directed? Could I disclose it without a blush to the world? Were
“ God

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“ God instantly to call me into judgment,
“ what account could I give of it to him ?
“ Shall I be the wiser or the better for
“ dwelling on such thoughts as now fill
“ my mind ? Are they entirely consistent
“ with my innocence, and with my pre-
“ sent and future peace ? If they are not,
“ to what purpose do I indulge such un-
“ profitable or dangerous musings ?”—By
frequent exercise of this inward scrutiny,
we might gradually bring imagination un-
der discipline, and turn the powers of
thought to their proper use as means of
improvement, instead of suffering them
to be only the instruments of vanity and
guilt.

IN the second place, in order to the
government of thought, it is necessary
to guard against idleness. Idleness is the
great fomentor of all corruptions in the
human heart. In particular, it is the pa-
rent of loose imaginations and inordinate
desires. The ever active and restless
power of thought, if not employed about
what is good, will naturally and unavoid-
ably

ably engender evil. Imagine not that mere occupation, of whatever kind it be, will exempt you from the blame and danger of an idle life. Perhaps the worst species of idleness is a dissipated, though seemingly busy life, spent in the haunts of loose society, and in the chace of perpetual amusement. Hence a giddy mind, alternately elated and dejected with trifles, occupied with no recollection of the past but what is fruitless, and with no plans for the future but what are either frivolous or guilty.

As, therefore, you would govern your thoughts, or indeed as you would have any thoughts that are worthy of being governed, provide honourable employment for the native activity of your minds. Keep knowledge, virtue, and usefulness, ever in view. Let your life proceed in a train of such pursuits as are worthy of a Christian, of a rational and social being. While these are regularly carried on as the main business of life, let amusement possess no more than its proper place in the distribution of your time. Take particu-

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lar care that your amusements be of an irreproachable kind, and that all your society be either improving or innocent. So shall the stream of your thoughts be made to run in a pure channel. Manly occupations and virtuous principles will expel the taint, which idleness never fails to communicate to the vacant mind.

IN the third place, when criminal thoughts arise, attend to all the proper methods of speedily suppressing them. Take example from the unhappy industry which sinners discover in banishing good ones, when a natural sense of religion forces them on their conscience. How anxiously do they fly from themselves! How studiously do they drown the voice which upbraids them in the noise of company or diversion! What numerous artifices do they employ to evade the uneasiness which returns of reflection would produce!— Were we to use equal diligence in preventing the entrance of vicious suggestions, or in expelling them when entered, why should we not be equally successful
in

in a much better cause? As soon as you are sensible that any dangerous passion begins to ferment, instantly call in other passions, and other ideas, to your aid. Hasten to turn your thoughts into a different direction. Summon up whatever you have found to be of power for composing and harmonizing your mind. Fly for assistance to serious studies, to prayer, and devotion; or even fly to business, or innocent society, if solitude be in hazard of favouring the seduction. By such means you may stop the progress of the growing evil. You may apply an antidote, before the poison has had time to work its full effect.

IN the fourth place, it will be particularly useful to impress your minds with an habitual sense of the presence of the Almighty. When we reflect what a strong check the belief of divine omniscience is calculated to give to all criminal thoughts, we are tempted to suspect, that even by Christians this article of faith is not received with sincere conviction. For who

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but must confess, that if he knew a parent, a friend, or a neighbour, to have the power of looking into his heart, he durst not allow himself that unbounded scope which he now gives to his imagination and desire? Whence, then, comes it to pass, that men, without fear or concern, bring into the presence of the awful Majesty of Heaven, that folly and licentiousness of thought which would make them blush and tremble, if one of their own fellow-creatures could descry it? At the same time, no principle is supported by clearer evidence, than the omniscience of God. All religious sects have admitted it, all societies of men, in their oaths and covenants, appeal to it. The Sovereign of the universe cannot but know what passes throughout his dominions. He who supports all nature, must needs pervade and fill it. He who formed the heart, is certainly conscious to what passes within it.

Never let this great article of faith escape from your view. In thinking, as well as in acting, accustom yourselves to look up with reverence to that piercing
eye



eye of divine observation, which *never slumbers nor sleeps*. Behold a pen always writing over your head, and making up that great record of your thoughts, words, and actions, from which at last you are to be judged. Think that you are never less alone, than when by yourselves ; for then is he still with you, whose inspection is of greater consequence than that of all mankind. Let these awful considerations not only check the dissipation of corrupt fancy, but infuse into your spirits that solemn composure which is the parent of meditation and wisdom. Let them not only expel what is evil, but introduce in its stead what is pure and holy ; elevating your thoughts to divine and eternal objects, and acting as the counterpoise to those attractions of the world, which would draw your whole attention downwards to sense and vanity.

SERMON III.

The same SUBJECT continued.

PROVERBS, iv. 23.

Keep thy heart with all diligence ; for out of it are the issues of life.

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HAVING treated, in the foregoing Discourse, of the government of the thoughts, I proceed to consider the government of the passions, as the next great duty included in the *keeping of the heart*.

Passions are strong emotions of the mind, occasioned by the view of apprehending good or evil. They are original parts of the constitution of our nature ; and therefore to extirpate them is a mistaken aim. Religion requires no more of us, than to moderate and rule them.

When

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When our blessed Lord assumed the nature, without the corruption, of man, he was subject to like passions with us. On some occasions, he felt the risings of anger. He was often touched with pity. He was *grieved in spirit*; he sorrowed, and he wept.

Passions, when properly directed, may be subservient to very useful ends. They rouse the dormant powers of the soul. They are even found to exalt them. They often raise a man above himself, and render him more penetrating, vigorous, and masterly, than he is in his calmer hours. Actuated by some high passion, he conceives great designs, and surmounts all difficulties in the execution. He is inspired with more lofty sentiments, and endowed with more persuasive utterance, than he possesses at any other time. Passions are the active forces of the soul. They are its highest powers brought into movement and exertion. But, like all other great powers, they are either useful or destructive, according to their direction and degree; as wind and fire are instru-

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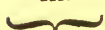
mental in carrying on many of the beneficent operations of nature ; but when they rise to undue violence, or deviate from their proper course, their path is marked with ruin.

It is the present infelicity of human nature, that those strong emotions of the mind are become too powerful for the principle which ought to regulate them. This is one of the unhappy consequences of our apostacy from God, that the influence of reason is weakened, and that of passion strengthened within the heart. When man revolted from his Maker, his passions rebelled against himself ; and, from being originally the ministers of reason, have become the tyrants of the soul. Hence, in treating of this subject, two things may be assumed as principles : first, that through the present weakness of the understanding, our passions are often directed towards improper objects ; and next, that even when their direction is just, and their objects are innocent, they perpetually tend to run into excess ; they always hurry us towards their gratification

tification with a blind and dangerous impetuosity. On these two points, then, turns the whole government of our passions: first, to ascertain the proper objects of their pursuit; and next, to restrain them in that pursuit, when they would carry us beyond the bounds of reason. If there be any passion which intrudes itself unseasonably into our mind, which darkens and troubles our judgment, or habitually discomposes our temper; which unfits us for properly discharging the duties, or disqualifies us for cheerfully enjoying the comforts of life, we may certainly conclude it to have gained a dangerous ascendant. The great object which we ought to propose to ourselves is, to acquire a firm and stedfast mind, which the infatuation of passion shall not seduce, nor its violence shake; which, resting on fixed principles, shall, in the midst of contending emotions, remain free and master of itself; able to listen calmly to the voice of conscience, and prepared to obey its dictates without hesitation.

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To obtain, if possible, such command of passion, is one of the highest attainments of the rational nature. Arguments to show its importance crowd upon us from every quarter. If there be any fertile source of mischief to human life, it is, beyond doubt, the misrule of passion. It is this which poisons the enjoyment of individuals, overturns the order of society, and strews the path of life with so many miseries, as to render it indeed the valley of tears. All those great scenes of public calamity, which we behold with astonishment and horror, have originated from the source of violent passions. These have overspread the earth with bloodshed. These have pointed the assassin's dagger, and filled the poisoned bowl. These, in every age, have furnished too copious materials for the orator's pathetic declamation, and for the poet's tragical song.

When from public life we descend to private conduct, though passion operate not there in such a wide and destructive sphere, we shall find its influence to be no less baneful. I need not mention the

black

black and fierce passions, such as envy, jealousy, and revenge, whose effects are obviously noxious, and whose agitations are immediate misery. But take any of the licentious and sensual kind. Suppose it to have unlimited scope; trace it throughout its course; and you will find that gradually, as it rises, it taints the soundness, and troubles the peace, of his mind over whom it reigns; that in its progress, it engages him in pursuits which are marked either with danger or with shame; that in the end, it wastes his fortune, destroys his health, or debases his character; and aggravates all the miseries in which it has involved him, with the concluding pangs of bitter remorse. Through all the stages of this fatal course, how many have heretofore run! What multitudes do we daily behold pursuing it with blind and headlong steps!

But, on the evils which flow from unrestrained passions, it is needless to enlarge. Hardly are there any so ignorant or inconsiderate as not to admit, that where passion is allowed to reign, both happiness

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ness and virtue must be impaired. I proceed therefore to what is of more consequence, to suggest some directions which may be useful in assisting us to preserve the government of our passions.

IN the first place, we must study to acquire just views of the comparative importance of those objects that are most ready to attract desire. The erroneous opinions which we form concerning happiness and misery, give rise to all the mistaken and dangerous passions which embroil our life. We suffer ourselves to be dazzled by unreal appearances of pleasure. We follow, with precipitancy, whithersoever the crowd leads. We admire, without examination, what our predecessors have admired. We fly from every shadow at which we see others tremble. Thus, agitated by vain fears and deceitful hopes, we are hurried into eager contests about objects which are in themselves of no value. By rectifying our opinions, we should strike at the root of the evil. If our vain imaginations were chastened,

chastened, the tumult of our passions would subside.

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It is observed, that the young and the ignorant are always the most violent in pursuit. The knowledge which is forced upon them by longer acquaintance with the world, moderates their impetuosity. Study then to anticipate, by reflection, that knowledge which experience often purchases at too dear a price. Inure yourselves to frequent consideration of the emptiness of those pleasures which excite so much strife and commotion among mankind. Think how much more of true enjoyment is lost by the violence of passion, than by the want of the things which give occasion to that passion. Persuade yourselves, that the favour of God and the possession of virtue form the chief happiness of the rational nature. Let a contented mind, and a peaceful life, hold the next place in your estimation. These are the conclusions which the wise and thinking part of mankind have always formed. To these conclusions, after
having

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having run the race of passion, you will probably come at the last. By forming them betimes, you would make a seasonable escape from that tempestuous region ; through which none can pass without suffering misery, contracting guilt, and undergoing severe remorse.

IN the second place, in order to attain the command of passion, it is requisite to acquire the power of self-denial. The self-denial of a Christian consists not in perpetual austerity of life, and universal renunciation of the innocent comforts of the world. Religion requires no such unnecessary sacrifices, nor is any such foe to present enjoyment. It consists in our being ready, on proper occasions, to abstain from pleasure, or to submit to suffering, for the sake of duty and conscience, or from a view to some higher and more extensive good. If we possess not this power, we shall be the prey of every loose inclination that chances to arise. Pampered by continual indulgence,
all

all our passions will become mutinous and headstrong. Desire, not reason, will be the ruling principle of our conduct.

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As, therefore, you would keep your passions within due bounds, you must sometimes accustom them to know the reins. You must not wait till some critical occasion for the exercise of self-denial occur. In vain you will attempt to act with authority, if your first essay be made when temptation has inflamed the mind. In cooler hours, you must sometimes abridge your enjoyment even of what is innocent. In the midst of lawful pleasure, you must maintain moderation, abstemiousness, and self-command. The observance of this discipline is the only method of supporting reason in its proper ascendant. For if you allow yourselves always to stretch to the utmost point of innocence and safety, beyond that point you will infallibly be hurried, when passion shall arise in its might to shake the heart.

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IN the third place, impress your minds deeply with this persuasion, that nothing is what it appears to be when you are under the power of passion. Be assured, that no judgment which you then form, can be in the least depended upon as sound or true. The fumes which arise from a heart boiling with violent passions, never fail to darken and trouble the understanding. When the gourd withered, under the shade of which the prophet Jonah reposed, his mind, already ruffled by the disappointment of his predictions, lost, on occasion of this slight incident, all command of itself; and, in the midst of his impatience, he *wished to die, rather than to live*. Instead of being calmed by that expostulating voice, *Dost thou well, O Jonah! to be angry because of the gourd?* he replied with great emotion, *I do well to be angry even unto death*. But did Jonah think so when his passion had abated? Do these sentiments bear the least resemblance to that humble and devout prayer, which, on another occasion,

sion, when in his calm mind, he put up to God? No two persons can differ more from each other, than the same person differs from himself, when agitated by passion, and when master of his reason. *I do well to be angry*, is the language of every man when his mind is inflamed. Every passion justifies itself. It brings in a thousand pretences to its aid. It borrows many a false colour, to hide its deformity. It possesses a sort of magic, by which it can magnify or diminish objects at pleasure, and transform the appearance of every thing within its sphere.

Let the knowledge of this imposture which passion practises, place you continually on your guard. Let the remembrance of it be ever at hand, to check the extravagant judgments which you are apt to pass in those moments of delusion. Listen to no suggestion which then arises. Form no conclusions on which you are to act. Assure yourselves that every thing is beheld through a false medium. Have patience for a little, and the illusion will vanish; the atmosphere

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will clear up around you, and objects return to be viewed in their native colours and just dimensions.

IN the fourth place, oppose early the beginnings of passion. Avoid particularly all such objects as are apt to excite passions which you know to predominate within you. As soon as you find the tempest rising, have recourse to every proper method, either of allaying its violence, or of escaping to a calmer shore. Hasten to call up emotions of an opposite nature. Study to conquer one passion, by means of some other which is of less dangerous tendency. Never account any thing small or trivial, which is in hazard of introducing disorder into your heart. Never make light of any desire which you feel gaining such progress as to threaten entire dominion. Blandishing it will appear at the first. As a gentle and innocent emotion, it may steal into the heart; but as it advances, it is likely to *pierce you through with many sorrows*. What you indulged as a favourite

yourite amusement, will shortly become a serious business; and in the end may prove the burden of your life. Most of our passions flatter us in their rise. But, their beginnings are treacherous; their growth is imperceptible; and the evils which they carry in their train lie concealed, until their dominion is established. What Solomon says of one of them, holds true of them all, that their *beginning is as when one letteth out water*. It issues from a small chink, which once might have been easily stopped; but, being neglected, it is soon widened by the stream; till the bank is at last totally thrown down, and the flood is at liberty to deluge the whole plain.

Prov. xvii:
14.

IN the fifth place, the excess of every passion will be moderated by frequent meditation on the vanity of the world, the short continuance of life, the approach of death, judgment, and eternity. The imaginary degree of importance which the neglect of such meditation suffers us to bestow on temporal things, is one great

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cause of our vehemence in desire, and our eagerness in pursuit. We attach ourselves to the objects around us, as if we could enjoy them for ever. Higher and more enlarged prospects of the destination of man, would naturally cool his misplaced ardour. For what can appear so considerable in human affairs, as to discompose or agitate the mind of him to whose view eternity lies open, and all the greatness of the universe of God? How contemptible will seem to him this hurry of spirits, this turmoil of passion, about things which are so soon to end?—Where are they who once disturbed the world with the violence of their contests, and filled it with the renown of their exploits? What now remains of their designs and enterprises, of their passions and pursuits, of their triumphs and their glory? The flood of time has passed over them, and swept them away, as if they had never been. The *fashion of the world* changes continually around us. We succeed one another in the human course, like troops of pilgrims on their journey.

Absurdly

Absurdly we spend our time in contending about the trifles of a day, while we ought to be preparing for a higher existence. Eternity is just at hand to close this introductory scene. It is fast rolling towards us, like the tide of a vast ocean, ready to swallow up all human concerns, and to leave no trace behind it, except the consequences of our good or bad deeds, which shall last for ever.—

Let such reflections allay the heat of passion. Let them reduce all human things to their proper standard. From frivolous pursuits let them recal our attention to objects of real importance ; to the proper business of man ; to the improvement of our nature, the discharge of our duty, the rational and religious conduct of human life.

IN the last place, to our own endeavours for regulating our passions, let us join earnest prayer to God. Here, if any where, divine assistance is requisite. For such is the present blindness and imperfection of human nature, that even to

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discover all the disorders of our heart, is become difficult; much more, to rectify them, is beyond our power. To that superior aid, then, which is promised to the pious and upright, let us look up with humble minds; beseeching the Father of mercies, that while we study to act our own part with resolution and vigilance, he would forgive our returning weakness; would strengthen our constancy in resisting the assaults of passion; and enable us by his grace so to govern our minds, that without considerable interruptions we may proceed in a course of piety and virtue.

It now remains to treat of the government of temper, as included in the *keeping of the heart*. Passions are quick and strong emotions, which by degrees subside. Temper is the disposition which remains after these emotions are past, and which forms the habitual propensity of the soul. The passions are like the stream when it is swoln by the torrent, and ruffled by the winds. The temper
resembles

resembles it when running within its bed, with its natural velocity and force. The influence of temper is more silent and imperceptible than that of passion. It operates with less violence; but as its operation is constant, it produces effects no less considerable. It is evident, therefore, that it highly deserves to be considered in a religious view.

Many, indeed, are averse to behold it in this light. They place a good temper upon the same footing with a healthy constitution of body. They consider it as a natural felicity which some enjoy; but for the want of which, others are not morally culpable, nor accountable to God; and hence the opinion has sometimes prevailed, that a bad temper might be consistent with a state of grace. If this were true, it would overturn that whole doctrine, of which the Gospel is so full, that regeneration, or change of nature, is the essential characteristic of a Christian. It would suppose that grace might dwell amidst malevolence and rancour, and that heaven might be enjoyed by such

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as are strangers to charity and love.—It will readily be admitted, that some, by the original frame of their mind, are more favourably inclined than others towards certain good dispositions and habits. But this affords no justification to those who neglect to oppose the corruptions to which they are prone. Let no man imagine that the human heart is a soil altogether unsusceptible of culture; or that the worst temper may not, through the assistance of grace, be reformed by attention and discipline. Settled depravity of temper is always owing to our own indulgence. If, in place of checking, we nourish that malignity of disposition to which we are inclined, all the consequences will be placed to our account, and every excuse from natural constitution be rejected at the tribunal of Heaven.

The proper regulation of temper affects the character of man in every relation which he bears; and includes the whole circle of religious and moral duties. This, therefore, is a subject of too great extent to be comprehended in one Discourse.

course. But it may be useful to take a general view of it; and before we conclude the doctrine of *keeping the heart*, to show what the habitual temper of a good man ought to be, with respect to God, to his neighbour, and to himself.

FIRST, With respect to God, what he ought to cultivate is a devout temper. This imports more than the care of performing the offices of religious worship. It denotes the sensibility of heart towards the Supreme Being, which springs from a deep impression of his perfections on the soul. It stands opposed, not only to that disregard of God which forms the description of the impious, but to that absence of religious affections which sometimes prevails among those who are imperfectly good. They acknowledge, perhaps, the obligations of duty. They feel some concern to *work out their salvation*. But they apply to their duty through mere constraint; and serve God without affection or complacency. More liberal and generous sentiments animate the man
who

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who is of a devout temper. God dwells upon his thoughts as a benefactor and a father, to whose voice he hearkens with joy. Amidst the occurrences of life, his mind naturally opens to the admiration of his wisdom, the reverence of his power, the love of his transcendent goodness. All nature appears to his view as stamped with the impress of these perfections. Habitual gratitude to his Maker for mercies past, and cheerful resignation to his will in all time to come, are the native effusions of his heart.

Such a temper as this deserves to be cultivated with the utmost attention ; for it contributes, in a high degree, both to our improvement and our happiness. It refines, and it exalts human nature. It softens that hardness which our hearts are ready to contract from frequent intercourse with this rugged world. It facilitates the discharge of every duty towards God and man. At the same time it is a temper peaceful and serene, elevated and rejoicing. It forms the current of our affections to flow in a placid tenour.

tenour. It opens pleasing prospects to the mind. It banishes harsh and bitter passions; and places us above the reach of many of the annoyances of worldly life. When the temper is truly devout, *the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keepeth the heart and soul.* I proceed,

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SECONDLY, To point out the proper state of our temper with respect to one another. It is evident, in the general, that if we consult either public welfare or private happiness, Christian charity ought to regulate our disposition in mutual intercourse. But as this great principle admits of several diversified appearances, let us consider some of the chief forms under which it ought to show itself in the usual tenour of life. Universal benevolence to mankind, when it rests in the abstract, is a loose indeterminate idea, rather than a principle of real effect; and too often floats as an useless speculation in the head, instead of affecting the temper and the heart.

What

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What first presents itself to be recommended, is a peaceable temper ; a disposition averse to give offence, and desirous of cultivating harmony, and amicable intercourse in society. This supposes yielding and condescending manners, unwillingness to contend with others about trifles, and, in contests that are unavoidable, proper moderation of spirit. Such a temper is the first principle of self-enjoyment. It is the basis of all order and happiness among mankind. The positive and contentious, the rude and quarrelsome, are the bane of society. They seem destined to blast the small share of comfort which nature has here allotted to man. But they cannot disturb the peace of others, more than they break their own. The hurricane rages first in their own bosom, before it is let forth upon the world. In the tempest which they raise, they are always tost ; and frequently it is their lot to perish.

A peaceable temper must be supported by a candid one, or a disposition to view the conduct of others with fairness
and

and impartiality. This stands opposed to a jealous and suspicious temper, which ascribes every action to the worst motive, and throws a black shade over every character. As you would be happy in yourselves, or in your connections with others, guard against this malignant spirit. Study that charity *which thinketh no evil*; that temper which, without degenerating into credulity, will dispose you to be just; and which can allow you to observe an error, without imputing it as a crime. Thus you will be kept free from that continual irritation which imaginary injuries raise in a suspicious breast; and will walk among men as your brethren, not your enemies.

But to be peaceable, and to be candid, is not all that is required of a good man. He must cultivate a kind, generous, and sympathizing temper, which feels for distress, wherever it is beheld; which enters into the concerns of his friends with ardour; and to all with whom he has intercourse, is gentle, obliging, and humane. How amiable appears such a disposition,
when

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when contrasted with a malicious or envious temper, which wraps itself up in its own narrow interest, looks with an evil eye on the success of others, and with an unnatural satisfaction feeds on their disappointments or miseries! How little does he know of the true happiness of life, who is a stranger to that intercourse of good offices and kind affections, which, by a pleasing charm, attach men to one another, and circulate joy from heart to heart!

You are not to imagine, that a benevolent temper finds no exercise, unless when opportunities offer of performing actions of high generosity, or of extensive utility. These may seldom occur. The condition of the greater part of mankind, in a good measure, precludes them. But in the ordinary round of human affairs, a thousand occasions daily present themselves, of mitigating the vexations which others suffer, of soothing their minds, of aiding their interest, of promoting their cheerfulness or ease. Such occasions may relate to the smaller incidents of life.

But

But let us remember, that of small incidents the system of human life is chiefly composed. The attentions which respect these, when suggested by real benignity of temper, are often more material to the happiness of those around us, than actions which carry the appearance of greater dignity and splendour. No wise or good man ought to account any rules of behaviour as below his regard, which tend to cement the great brotherhood of mankind in comfortable union.

Particularly amidst that familiar intercourse which belongs to domestic life, all the virtues of temper find an ample range. It is very unfortunate, that within that circle, men too often think themselves at liberty to give unrestrained vent to the caprice of passion and humour. Whereas there, on the contrary, more than any where, it concerns them to attend to the government of their heart; to check what is violent in their tempers, and to soften what is harsh in their manners. For there the temper is formed. There the real character displays itself. The forms
of

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of the world disguise men when abroad. But within his own family, every man is known to be what he truly is.—In all our intercourse, then, with others, particularly in that which is closest and most intimate, let us cultivate a peaceable, a candid, a gentle and friendly temper. This is the temper to which, by repeated injunctions, our holy religion seeks to form us. This was the temper of Christ. This is the temper of Heaven.

WE are now to consider, thirdly, The proper state of temper, as it respects the individual himself. The basis of all the good dispositions which belong to this head, is humility. By this I understand, not that meanness of spirit which leads a man to undervalue himself, and to sink below his rank and character; but what the Scripture expresses with great propriety, when it exhorts *every man, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly*. He who adopts all the flattering suggestions of self-love, and forms claims upon the world

Rom. xii. 3.

propor-

proportioned to the imaginary opinion which he has conceived of his merit, is preparing for himself a thousand mortifications. Whereas, by checking the risings of ill-founded vanity, and retreating within those bounds which a moderate estimation of our character prescribes, we escape the miseries which always pursue an arrogant mind, and recommend ourselves to the favour both of God and man.

Hence will naturally arise a contented temper, which is one of the greatest blessings that can be enjoyed by man, and one of the most material requisites to the proper discharge of the duties of every station. For, a fretful and discontented temper renders one incapable of performing aright any part in life. It is unthankful and impious towards God; and towards men, provoking and unjust. It is a gangrene, which preys on the vitals, and infects the whole constitution with disease and putrefaction. Subdue pride and vanity, and you will take the most effectual method of eradicating this distemper. You

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will no longer behold the objects around you with jaundiced eyes. You will take in good part the blessings which Providence is pleased to bestow, and the degree of favour which your fellow-creatures are disposed to grant you. Viewing yourselves, with all your imperfections and failings, in a just light, you will rather be surprised at your enjoying so many good things, than discontented, because there are many which you want.

From a humble and contented temper will spring a cheerful one. 'This, if not in itself a virtue, is at least the garb in which virtue should be always arrayed. Piety and goodness ought never to be marked with that dejection which sometimes takes rise from superstition, but which is the proper portion only of guilt. At the same time, the cheerfulness belonging to virtue is to be carefully distinguished from that light and giddy temper which characterizes folly, and is so often found among the dissipated and vicious part of mankind. 'Their gaiety is owing to a total want of reflexion; and brings with

with it the usual consequences of an unthinking habit, shame, remorse, and heaviness of heart, in the end. The cheerfulness of a well-regulated mind springs from a good conscience and the favour of Heaven, and is bounded by temperance and reason. It makes a man happy in himself, and promotes the happiness of all around him. It is the clear and calm sunshine of a mind illuminated by piety and virtue. It crowns all other good dispositions, and comprehends the general effect which they ought to produce on the heart.

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SUCH, on the whole, is the temper, or habitual frame of mind, in a good man : Devout towards God ; towards men, peaceable, candid, affectionate, and humane ; within himself, humble, contented, and cheerful. To the establishment of this happy temper, all the directions which I before suggested for the due regulation of the thoughts, and for the government of the passions, naturally conduce ; in this they ought to issue ; and

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when this temper is thoroughly formed within us, then may the heart be esteemed to have been *kept with all diligence*. That we may be thus enabled to keep it, for the sake both of present enjoyment, and of preparation for greater happiness, let us earnestly pray to Heaven. A greater blessing we cannot implore of the Almighty, than that he who made the human heart, and who knows its frailties, would assist us to subject it to that discipline which religion requires, which reason approves, but which his grace alone can enable us to maintain.

SERMON IV.

On the UNCHANGEABLENESS of the
DIVINE NATURE.

JAMES, i. 17.

*Every good and every perfect gift is from
above, and cometh down from the Father
of Lights, with whom is no variableness,
neither shadow of turning.*

THE divine nature, in some views, attracts our love ; in others, commands our reverence ; in all, is entitled to the highest attention from the human mind. We never elevate our thoughts, in a proper manner, towards the Supreme Being, without returning to our own sphere with sentiments more improved ; and if, at any time, his greatness oppresses our thoughts,

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his moral perfections always afford us relief. His almighty power, his infinite wisdom, and extreme goodness, are sounds familiar to our ears. In his immutability we are less accustomed to consider him; and yet it is this perfection which, perhaps, more than any other, distinguishes the divine nature from the human; gives complete energy to all its other attributes, and entitles it to the highest adoration. For, hence are derived the regular order of nature, and the steadfastness of the universe. Hence flows the unchanging tenour of those laws which, from age to age, regulate the conduct of mankind. Hence the uniformity of that government, and the certainty of those promises, which are the ground of our trust and security. Goodness could produce no more than feeble and wavering hopes, and power would command very imperfect reverence, if we were left to suspect that the plans which goodness had framed might alter, or that the power of carrying them into execution might decrease. The contemplation of God, therefore,

therefore, as unchangeable in his nature and in all his perfections, must undoubtedly be fruitful both of instruction and of consolation to man. I shall first endeavour to illustrate, in some degree, the nature of the divine immutability; and then make application of it to our own conduct.

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EVERY good and every perfect gift, cometh down from the *Father of Lights*. The title which in the Text is given to the Deity, carries an elegant allusion to the Sun, the source of light, the most universal benefactor of nature, the most regular and constant of all the great bodies with which we are acquainted in the universe. Yet even with the Sun there are certain degrees of *variableness*. He apparently rises and sets; he seems to approach nearer to us in summer, and to retire farther off in winter; his influence is varied by the seasons, and his lustre is affected by the clouds. Whereas with him who is the *Father of Lights*, of whose everlasting brightness the glory of the Sun

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is but a faint image, there is no *shadow of turning*, not the most distant approach to change. In his being or essence it is plain that alteration can never take place. For as his existence is derived from no prior cause, nor dependent on any thing without himself, his nature can be influenced by no power, can be affected by no accident, can be impaired by no time. From everlasting to everlasting, he continues the same. Hence it is said, that *he only hath immortality*; that is, he possesses it in a manner incommunicable to all other beings. Eternity is described as the *high and holy place in which he dwelleth*; it is a habitation in which none but the *Father of Lights* can enter. The name which he taketh to himself is, *I am*. Of other things, some have been, and others shall be; but this is he, *which is, which was, and which is to come*. All time is his; it is measured out by him in limited portions to the various orders of created beings; but his own existence fills equally every point of duration; *the first and the last, the beginning*

ginning and the end, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

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As in his essence, so in his attributes and perfections, it is impossible there can be any change. To imperfect natures only it belongs to improve and to decay. Every alteration which they undergo in their abilities or dispositions, flows either from internal defect, or from the influence of a superiour cause. But as no higher cause can bring from without any accession to the divine nature, so within itself it contains no principle of decay. For the same reason that the self-existent Being was from the beginning powerful and wise, just and good, he must continue unalterably so for ever. Hence, with much propriety, the divine perfections are described in Scripture by allusions to those objects to which we ascribe the most permanent stability. *His righteousness is like the strong mountains. His mercy is in the heavens; and his faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds.* These perfections of the divine nature differ widely from the human virtues, which are
their

their faint shadows. The justice of men is at one time severe, at another time relenting; their goodness is sometimes confined to a partial fondness for a few, sometimes runs out into a blind indulgence towards all. But goodness and justice are in the Supreme Being calm and steady principles of action, which, enlightened by perfect wisdom, and never either warped by partiality, or disturbed by passion, persevere in one regular and constant tenour. Among men, they may sometimes break forth with transient splendour, like those wandering fires which illuminate for a little the darkness of the night. But in God, they shine with that uniform brightness, which we can liken to nothing so much as to the untroubled, eternal lustre of the highest heavens.

From this follows, what is chiefly material for us to attend to, that in the course of his operations towards mankind, in his counsels and decrees, in his laws, his promises, and in his threatenings, there is *no variableness nor shadow of turning* with the Almighty. *Known to him from*
the

the beginning were all his works. In the divine idea the whole system of nature existed, long before the foundations of the earth were laid. When he said, *Let there be light*, he only realised the great plan which, from everlasting, he had formed in his own mind. Foreseen by him was every revolution which the course of ages was to produce. Whatever the counsels of men can effect, was comprehended in his decree. No new emergency can arise to surprise him. No agitations of anger or of sorrow, of fear or of hope, can shake his mind or influence his conduct. He rests in the eternal possession of that Supreme beatitude, which neither the virtues nor the crimes of men can in the least affect. From a motive of overflowing goodness, he reared up the universe. As the eternal lover of righteousness, he rules it. The whole system of his government is fixed; his laws are irrevocable; and, what he once loveth, *he loveth to the end*. In Scripture, indeed, he is sometimes said to *be grieved*, and to *repent*. But such expressions, it is obvious,

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obvious, are employed from accommodation to common conception; in the same manner as when bodily organs are, in other passages, ascribed to God. The Scripture, as a rule of life addressed to the multitude, must make use of the language of men. The divine nature, represented in its native sublimity, would have transcended all human conception. When, upon the reformation of sinners, God is said to *repent of the evil* which he hath threatened against them; this intimates no more than that he suits his dispensations to the alterations which take place in the characters of men. His disposition towards good and evil continues the same, but varies in its application as its objects vary; just as the laws themselves, which are capable of no change of affection, bring rewards or punishments at different times to the same person, according as his behaviour alters. Immutability is indeed so closely connected with the notion of supreme perfection, that wherever any rational conceptions of a Deity have taken place, this attribute has been ascribed

scribed to him. Reason taught the wise and reflecting in every age to believe, that as what is eternal cannot die, so what is perfect can never vary, and that the great Governour of the universe could be no other than an unchangeable Being.

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FROM the contemplation of this obvious, but fundamental truth, let us proceed to the practical improvement of it. Let us consider what effect the serious consideration of it ought to produce on our mind and behaviour.

It will be proper to begin this head of discourse by removing an objection which the doctrine I have illustrated may appear to form against religious services, and in particular against the duty of prayer. To what purpose, it may be urged, is homage addressed to a Being whose purpose is unalterably fixed; to whom *our righteousness extendeth not*; whom by no arguments we can persuade, and by no supplications we can mollify? The objection would have weight, if our religious addresses were designed to work any alteration

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teration on God; either by giving him information of what he did not know; or by exciting affections which he did not possess; or by inducing him to change measures which he had previously formed. But they are only crude and imperfect notions of religion which can suggest such ideas. The change which our devotions are intended to make, is upon ourselves, not upon the Almighty. Their chief efficacy is derived from the good dispositions which they raise and cherish in the human soul. By pouring out pious sentiments and desires before God, by adoring his perfection, and confessing our own unworthiness, by expressing our dependence on his aid, our gratitude for his past favours, our submission to his present will, our trust in his future mercy, we cultivate such affections as suit our place and station in the universe, and are thereby prepared for becoming objects of the divine grace. Accordingly, frequent assurances are given us in Scripture, that the prayers of sincere worshippers, preferred through the great Mediator, shall be productive
of

of the happiest effects. *When they ask, they shall receive; when they seek, they shall find; when they knock, it shall be opened to them.* Prayer is appointed to be the channel for conveying the divine grace to mankind, because the wisdom of Heaven saw it to be one of the most powerful means of improving the human heart.

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When religious homage is considered in this light, as a great instrument of spiritual and moral improvement, all the objections which scepticism can form from the divine immutability, conclude with no more force against prayer, than against every other mean of improvement which reason has suggested to man. If prayer be superfluous, because God is unchangeable, we might upon similar grounds conclude, that it is needless to labour the earth, to nourish our bodies, or to cultivate our minds, because the fertility of the ground, the continuance of our life, and the degree of our understanding, depend upon an immutable Sovereign, and were from all eternity foreseen by him.

Such

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Such absurd conclusions reason has ever repudiated. To every plain and sound understanding it has clearly dictated, that to explore the unknown purposes of Heaven belongs not to us; but that He who decrees the end, certainly requires the means; and that, in the diligent employment of all the means which can advance either our temporal or spiritual felicity, the chief exertions of human wisdom and human duty consist. Assuming it then for an undoubted principle, that religion is a reasonable service, and that, though with the *Father of Lights* there be *no variableness*, the homage of his creatures is nevertheless, for the wisest reasons, required by him, I proceed to show what sentiments the contemplation of divine immutability should raise in our minds, and what duties it should chiefly enforce.

I. LET it excite us to admire and adore. Filled with profound reverence, let us look up to that Supreme Being who sits from everlasting on the throne of the universe;

universe; moving all things, but remaining immoveable himself; directing every revolution of the creation, but affected by no revolutions of events or of time. He beholds the heavens and the earth *wax old as a garment, and decay like a vesture*. At their appointed periods he raises up, or he dissolves worlds. But amidst all the convulsions of changing and perishing nature, his glory and felicity remain unaltered.—The view of great and stupendous objects in the natural world strikes the mind with solemn awe. What veneration, then, ought to be inspired by the contemplation of an object so sublime as the eternal and unchangeable Ruler of the universe! The composure and stillness of thought introduced by such a meditation, has a powerful tendency both to purify and to elevate the heart. It effaces, for a time, those trivial ideas, and extinguishes those low passions, which arise from the circle of vain and passing objects around us. It opens the mind to all the sentiments of devo-

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tion ; and accompanies devotion with that profound reverence, which guards it from every improper excess. When we consider the Supreme Being as employed in works of love ; when we think of his condescension to the human race in sending his Son to dwell on the earth ; encouraged by favours, and warmed by gratitude, we are sometimes in danger of presuming too much on his goodness, and of indulging a certain fondness of affection, which is unsuitable to our humble and dependent state. It is necessary that he should frequently appear to our minds in all that majesty with which the immutability of his nature clothes him ; in order that reverence may be combined with love, and that a mixture of sacred awe may chasten the rapturous effusions of warm devotion. Servile fear, indeed, would crush the spirit of ingenuous and affectionate homage. But that reverence which springs from elevated conceptions of the divine nature, has a happy effect in checking the forwardness of imagination, restraining our affections within

within due bounds, and composing our thoughts at the same time that it exalts them.

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When, from the adoration of the unchangeable perfection of the Almighty, we return to the view of our own state, the first sentiment which ought naturally to arise, is that of self-abasement. We are too apt to be lifted up by any little distinctions which we possess; and to fancy ourselves great, only because there are others whom we consider as less. But what is man, with all his advantages and boasted powers, before the eternal *Father of Lights*? With God there is no variableness; with man there is no stability. Virtue and vice divide the empire of his mind; and wisdom and folly alternately rule him. Hence he is changeable in his designs, fickle in his friendships, fluctuating in his whole character. His life is a series of contradictions. He is one thing to-day, and another to-morrow; sometimes obliged by experience to alter his purpose, and often led to change it through levity. Variable and unequal himself, he is surrounded with

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fleeting objects. He is placed as in the midst of a torrent, where all things are rolling by, and nothing keeps its place. He has hardly time to contemplate this scene of vicissitude, before he too is swept away. Thus circumstanced in himself, and in all the objects with which he is connected, let him be admonished to be humble and modest. Let the contemplation of the unchanging glory of his Creator inspire him with sentiments of due submission. Let it teach him to know his proper place; and check that vanity which is so ready to betray him into guilt.

Let the same meditation affect him with a deep sense of what he owes to the goodness of the Deity. His goodness never appears in so striking a light, as when viewed in connection with his greatness. The description which is given of him in the Text, calls, in this view, for our particular attention. It presents to us the most amiable union of condescension with majesty, of the moral with the natural perfections of God, which can possibly be exhibited to the imagination of man. *From the*

the Father of Lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning, cometh down every good and perfect gift.

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The most independent of all Beings is represented as the most beneficent. He who is eternal and immutable, exalted above all, and incapable of receiving returns from any, is the liberal and unwearied Giver of every thing that is good. —Let such views of the divine nature not only call forth gratitude and praise, but prompt us to imitate what we adore. Let them show us that benevolence is divine; that to stoop from our fancied grandeur in order to assist and relieve one another, is so far from being any degradation of character, that it is our truest honour, and our nearest resemblance to *the Father of Lights*.

II. LET the consideration of the divine immutability convince us, that the method of attaining the favour of Heaven is one and invariable. Were the Almighty a capricious and inconstant Being, like man, we should be at a loss what tenour of con-

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duct to hold. In order to conciliate his grace, we might think of applying sometimes to one supposed principle of his inclination, sometimes to another ; and, bewildered amidst various attempts, would be overwhelmed with dismay. The guilty would essay to flatter him. The timid, sometimes by austere mortifications, sometimes by costly gifts, sometimes by obsequious rites, would try to appease him. Hence, in fact, have arisen all the corruptions of religious worship among men ; from their forming the divine character upon their own, and ascribing to the Sovereign of the Universe the mutability of human passions. God is represented by the psalmist David as saying to the wicked,

Psal'm l. 21. *Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself.* This continues to be the description of all the superstitious and enthusiastic sects, which, since the days of David, have sprung up in the world.

It is our peculiar happiness, under the Gospel, to have God revealed to us in his genuine character ; as *without variableness or shadow of turning.* We know that at

no time there is any change, either in his affections, or in the plan of his administration. One light always shines upon us from above. One clear and direct path is always pointed out to man. 'The Supreme Being is, and was, and ever will be, the supporter of order and virtue; the *righteous Lord loving righteousness*. 'The external forms of religion may vary; but under all dispensations which proceed from God, its substance is the same. It tends continually to one point, the purification of man's heart and life. 'This was the object of the original law of nature. 'This was the scope of the Mosaic institution amidst all its sacrifices and rites; and this is unquestionably the end of the Gospel. So invariably constant is God to this purpose, that the dispensation of mercy in Christ Jesus, which admits of the vicarious atonement and righteousness of a Redeemer, makes no change in our obligation to fulfil the duties of a good life. 'The Redeemer himself hath taught us, that to the end of time the moral law continues in its full force; and that *till heaven and*

Mat. v. 18.

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earth pass away, one jot or tittle shall in no wise pass from it. 'This is the only institution known to men, whose authority is unchanging and constant. Human laws rise and fall with the empires that gave them birth. Systems of philosophy vary with the progress of knowledge and light. Manners, sentiments, and opinions, alter with the course of time. But throughout all ages, and amidst all revolutions, the rule of moral and religious conduct is the same. It partakes of that immutability of the divine nature, on which it is founded. Such as it was delivered to the first worshippers of God, it continues to be, at this day, to us; and such it shall remain to our posterity for ever.

III. LET the contemplation of this perfection of the divine nature teach us to imitate, as far as our frailty will permit, that constancy and steadfastness which we adore. All the moral attributes of the Supreme Being are standards of character towards which we ought to aspire. But as in all these perfections there are properties

ties peculiar to the divine nature, our endeavours to resemble them are laid under great restrictions by the dissimilarity between our nature and the divine. With respect to that attribute which we now consider, the circumstances are evident which preclude improper imitation. To man it is frequently necessary to correct his errors, and to change his conduct. An attempt, therefore, to continue wholly invariable, would, in our situation, be no other than imprudent and criminal obstinacy. But withal, the immediate rectitude of the Deity should lead us to aspire after fixedness of principle, and uniformity in conduct, as the glory of the rational nature. Impressed with the sense of that supreme excellence which results from unchanging goodness, faithfulness, and truth, let us become ashamed of that levity which degrades the human character. Let us *ponder our paths*, act upon a well-regulated plan, and remain consistent with ourselves. Contemplating the glory of the Father of Lights, let us aim at being transformed, in
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some degree, *into the same image, from glory to glory.* Finally,

IV. LET the divine immutability become the ground of confidence and trust to good men, amidst all the revolutions of this uncertain world. This is one of the chief improvements to be made of the subject, and therefore requires full illustration. There are three lights in which we may view the benefit redounding to us from that attribute of God which we now consider. It assures us of the constancy of Nature; of the regular administration of Providence; of the certain accomplishment of all the divine promises.

First, It gives us ground to depend on the constant and uniform course of Nature. On the unchangeableness of God rests the stability of the universe. What we call the laws of Nature, are no other than the decrees of the Supreme Being. It is because He is *without variableness or shadow of turning*, that those laws have continued the same since the beginning of the

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the world ; that the Sun so constantly observes his time of rising and going down ; that the seasons annually return ; the tides periodically ebb and flow ; the earth yields its fruit at stated intervals ; and the human body and mental powers advance to maturity by a regular progress. In all those motions and operations which are incessantly going on throughout nature, there is no stop nor interruption ; no change nor innovation ; no deflection from their main scope. 'The same powerful and steady hand which gave the first impulse to the powers of nature, restrains them from ever exceeding their prescribed line. Hence arises the chief comfort of our present life. We find ourselves in a regular and orderly world. We look forward to a known succession of events. We are enabled to form plans of action. From the cause, we calculate the effect ; and from the past, we reason with confidence concerning the future.

Accustomed from our infancy to this constancy in Nature, we are hardly sensible of the blessing. Familiarity has the same effect

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effect here, as in many other enjoyments, to efface gratitude. But let us, for a moment, take an opposite view of things. Let us suppose, that we had any cause to dread capriciousness or change in the Power who rules the course of Nature ; any ground to suspect that, but for one day, the Sun might not rise, nor the current of the waters hold their usual course, nor the laws of motion and vegetation proceed as we have been accustomed to behold them. What dismay would instantly fill all hearts ! What horror would seem to overspread the whole face of Nature ! What part could we act, or whither could we run, in the midst of convulsions, which overturned all the measures we had formed for happiness, or for safety ? The present abode of man would then become, as Job

Job, x. 22. describes the region of the grave, *a land of darkness, as darkness itself, and the shadow of death ; without any order ; and where the light is as darkness.* With what joy ought we then to recognise an unvarying and steadfast Ruler, under whose dominion we have no such disasters to dread ;

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but can depend on the course of Nature continuing to proceed as it has ever gone on, until the period shall arrive of its final dissolution!

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BUT though the great laws of Nature be constant like their Author, yet in the affairs of men there is much variety and change. All that regards our present possessions and enjoyments was, for wise reasons, left, in a great measure, uncertain; and from this uncertainty arises the distress of human life. Sensible of the changes to which we lie open, we look round with anxious eyes, and eagerly grasp at every object which appears to promise us security. But in vain is the whole circle of human things explored with this view. There is nothing on earth so stable as to assure us of undisturbed rest, nor so powerful as to afford us constant protection. Time, death, and change, triumph over all the labours of men. What we build up, they incessantly destroy. The public condition of nations, and the private fortunes of individuals, are alike sub-
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ject to reverse. Life never retains long the same form. Its whole scenery is continually shifting round us.—Amidst those endless vicissitudes, what can give any firm consolation, any satisfying rest to the heart, except the dominion of a wise and righteous Sovereign, *with whom there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning?* Though all things change, and we ourselves be involved in the general mutability, yet as long as there is fixed and permanent goodness at the head of the universe, we are assured that the great interests of all good men shall be safe. That *river* perpetually flows, *the streams whereof make glad the city of God.* We know that the Supreme Being loved righteousness from the beginning of days, and that he will continue to love it to the last. Under his government none of those revolutions happen which have place among the kingdoms of the earth; where princes die, and new sovereigns ascend the throne; new ministers and new counsels succeed; the whole face of affairs is changed; and former plans fall into oblivion. But *the throne of the*
Lord

Lord is established for ever ; and the thoughts of his heart endure to all generations. We serve the same God whom our fathers worshipped, and whom our posterity shall adore. His unchanging dominion comprehends all events and all ages ; establishes a connecting principle which holds together the past, the present, and the future ; gives stability to things which in themselves are fluctuating, and extracts order from those which appear most confused. Well may *the earth rejoice, and the multitude of isles be glad*, because there reigneth over the universe such an immutable Lord.

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Were you to unhinge this great article of faith ; were you either to *say with the fool*, that there is *no God*, or to suppose with the superstitious, that the God who rules is variable and capricious ; you would, indeed, *lay the axe to the root of the tree*, and cut down with one blow, the hope and security of mankind. For you would then leave nothing in the whole compass of nature, but a round of casual and transitory being ; no foundation

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tion of trust, no protection to the righteous, no stedfast principle to uphold and to regulate the succession of existence. Instead of that magnificent spectacle which the world now exhibits, when beheld in connection with the divine government, it would then only present to view a multitude of short-lived creatures, springing out of the dust, wandering on the face of the earth without guide or protector, struggling for a few years against the torrent of uncertainty and change ; and then sinking into utter oblivion, and vanishing like visions of the night. Mysterious obscurity would involve the beginning of things ; disorder would mark their progress ; and the blackness of darkness would cover their final result. Whereas, when Faith enables us to recover an universal Sovereign, whose power never fails, and whose wisdom and goodness never change, the prospect clears up on every side. A ray from the great source of light seems to illuminate the whole creation. Good men discover a parent and a friend. They attain a fortress in every danger ; a refuge amidst

amidst all storms ; *a dwelling-place in all generations. They are no longer afraid of evil tidings. Their heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.*

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THOUGH these reasonings, from the unchanging tenour of divine government, cannot but afford much comfort to good men, their satisfaction, however, becomes still more complete, when they consider the explicit promises which are given them in the word of God. The immutability of the divine purpose assures them most perfectly of those promises being fulfilled in due time, how adverse soever circumstances may at present appear to their accomplishment. *The Strength of Israel is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent. Hath he said it, and shall he not do it? Hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?* Men have the command only of the present time. When that is suffered to pass, changes may befall, either in their own state, or in the situation of things around them, which shall defeat their best intentions in our be-



half, and render all their promises fruitless. Hence, even setting aside the danger of human inconstancy, the confidence which we can repose on any earthly protector is extremely imperfect. Man, in his highest glory, is but a reed floating on the stream of time, and forced to follow every new direction of the current. But God is *the rock of ages*. All time is equally in his hands. Intervening accidents cannot embarrass him ; nor any unforeseen obstacle retard the performance of his most distant promise. *One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years are as one day.* There is no vicissitude in the human state in which good men cannot take sanctuary with him as a sure and abiding friend ; the safe conductor of their pilgrimage here, as well as the eternal rest of their souls hereafter. All their patrons may desert them, and all their friends may die ; but *the Lord still lives, who is their rock ; and the most high God, who is their Redeemer.* He hath promised that he *will not leave them when they are old, nor forsake them when their*
strength

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strength faileth ; and that even when their hearts shall faint, and their flesh fail, he will be the strength of their heart, and their portion for ever. His immutability is not only the ground of trust in him during their own abode on earth, but gives them the satisfaction of looking forward to the same wise and good administration as continued to the end of time. When departing hence, and bidding adieu to life, with all its changeful scenes, they can with comfort and peace leave their family, their friends, and their dearest concerns, in the hands of that God who reigneth for ever; and whose *countenance shall always behold the upright* with the same complacency. *My days are like a shadow that declineth, and I am withered like the grass. But thou, O Lord, shalt endure for ever ; and thy remembrance to all generations. The children of thy servants shall continue ; and their seed shall be established before thee.*

Psalm cii.
11, 12. 23.

SUCH are the benefits which good men may derive from meditating on God as *without variableness or shadow of turning.*

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It inspires them with sentiments of devout, humble, and grateful adoration. It points out to them the unvarying tenour of conduct which they ought to hold; checks their fickleness and inconstancy; and, amidst all distresses and fears, affords them comfort. The immutability of God is the surest basis on which their hopes can be built. It is indeed the pillar on which the whole universe rests.—On such serious and solemn meditations let our thoughts often dwell, in order to correct that folly and levity which are so apt to take possession of the human heart. And if our minds be overawed, and even depressed with so high a view of the divine nature, let them be relieved by the reflection, that to this unchangeable God we are permitted to look up, through a gracious Mediator, who, though possessed of divine perfection, is not unconscious of human distress and frailty.

SERMON V.

On the COMPASSION of CHRIST.

[Preached at the Celebration of the Sacrament of the
Lord's Supper.]

HEBREWS, iv. 15.

*We have not an high priest which cannot be
touched with the feelings of our infirmi-
ties ; but was in all points tempted like as
we are, yet without sin.*

WHEN we compare the counsels of Providence with the plans of men, we find a like difference obtain, as in the works of nature compared with those of art. The works of art may, at first view, appear the most finished and beautiful ; but when the eye is assisted to pry into their contexture, the nicest workmanship is discerned to be rough and blemished. Whereas the

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works of nature gain by the most accurate examination ; and those which on a superficial survey appear defective or rude, the more intimately they are inspected, discover the more exact construction and consummate beauty. In the same manner, the systems of worldly policy, though at first they seem plausible and profound, soon betray in their progress the narrowness of the human understanding ; while those dispensations of Providence, which appeared to furnish objections either against the goodness or the wisdom of Heaven, have, upon a more extensive view of their consequences, frequently afforded the most striking proofs of both.

God manifested in the flesh, was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness. It contradicted every prepossession which their confined ideas of religion and philosophy led them to entertain. If a superiour Being was to interpose for the restoration of a degenerate world, they concluded that he would certainly appear in celestial majesty. But *the thoughts of God are not as the thoughts of*

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of men. 'The divine wisdom saw it to be fit that the Saviour of mankind should in *all things be made like unto those* whom he came to save. By living as a man among men, he dispensed instruction in the most winning manner. He added to instruction the grace and the force of his own example. He accommodated that example to the most trying and difficult situations of human life; and, by suffering a painful death, he both taught men how to suffer and die; and in that nature which had offended, he offered a solemn expiation to God for human guilt.

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Besides these ends, so worthy of God, which were accomplished by the incarnation of Christ, another, of high importance, is suggested in the Text. Human life is to good men, as well as to others, a state of suffering and distress. To supply them with proper consolation and encouragement during such a state, was one great purpose of the undertaking of Christ. With this view he assumed the office of their high priest, or mediator with God; and the encouragement which this office

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affords them, will be proportioned to their assured belief, first of his power, and next of his compassion. His power is set forth in the verse preceding the Text, and the proper argument is founded upon it. *Seeing that we have a great high priest who is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.* But though it be encouraging to know that our high priest is the *Son of God*, and that he is *passed into the heavens*, yet these facts alone are not sufficient to render him the full object of our confidence. For, as the apostle afterwards observes, it belongs to the character of a high priest *to be taken from among men, that he may have compassion on the ignorant and them that are out of the way, seeing that he himself is compassed with infirmity.* In order then to satisfy us of our high priest's possessing also the qualifications of mercy and compassion, we are told that he is *touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and was in all points tempted like as we are.* The force of this consideration I purpose now to illustrate. I shall first explain the facts which

which are stated in the 'Text, and then show how from these our Saviour's compassion is to be inferred, and in what manner it may be accommodated to the consolation and hope of good men amidst various exigencies of life.

THE assertion in the 'Text, of Christ's being *touched with the feeling of our infirmities*, plainly implies that he had full experience, both of the external distresses, and of the internal sorrows, of human nature. Assuming a body such as ours, he subjected himself to all the natural consequences of corporeal frailty. He did not choose for himself an easy and opulent condition, in order to glide through the world with the least molestation. He did not suit his mission to the upper ranks of mankind chiefly, by assimilating his state to theirs; but, born in meanness, and bred up to labour, he submitted to the inconveniencies of that poor and toilsome life which falls to the share of the most numerous part of the human race. Whatever is severe in the disregard of relations

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or the ingratitude of friends, in the scorn of the proud or the insults of the mean, in the virulence of reproach or the sharpness of pain, was undergone by Christ. Though his life was short, he familiarised himself in it with a wide compass of human woe; and there is almost no distressful situation to which we can be reduced, but what he has experienced before us. There is not the least reason to imagine that the eminence of his nature raised him above the sensations of trouble and grief. Had this been the case, he would have been a sufferer in appearance only, not in reality; there would have been no merit in his patience, or in the resignation which he expressed. On the contrary, it appears, from many circumstances, that the sensibility of his nature was tender and exquisite. He affected none of that hard indifference in which some ancient philosophers vainly gloried. He felt as a man, and he sympathized with the feelings of others. On different occasions we are informed that he was *troubled in spirit*, that *he groaned*, and that *he wept*. The relation

tion of his agony in the garden of Gethsemane exhibits a striking picture of the sensations of innocent nature oppressed with anguish. It discovers all the conflict between the dread of suffering on the one hand, and the sense of duty on the other; the man struggling for a while with human weakness, and in the end recollected in virtue, and rising superiour to the objects of dismay which were then in his view. *Father! if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt. Thy will be done.* Thus was our Saviour touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.

It is added in the Text, that he was in all points tempted like as we are. To be tempted is, in the language of Scripture, to undergo such trials of virtue as are accompanied with difficulty and conflict. Though our Lord was not liable to any temptations from depravity of nature, yet he was perpetually exposed to such as arise from situations the most adverse to virtue.

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virtue. His whole life was in this respect a course of temptation ; that is, a severe trial of his constancy by every discouragement. He suffered repeated provocations both from friends and foes. His endeavours to do good were requited with the most obstinate and perverse opposition. Sometimes by the solicitations of ignorant multitudes he was tempted to accept the proffers of worldly greatness. Oftener, by the insults of multitudes, more blind and brutal, he was tempted to desert an office which exposed him to so much misery. Together with the world, the powers of darkness also combined their efforts against him. We are informed that he was *led into the wilderness*, and, amidst the horrors of a wild and dreary solitude, was *tempted of the devil*. The great adversary of mankind seems to have been permitted to exert unusual proofs of his power and malice, on purpose that the trial of our Saviour's constancy might be more complete, and his victory over him more illustrious and distinguished.

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From all these circumstances, the conclusion is obvious, that our Lord knows, from personal experience, all the discouragements and temptations which virtue can suffer. Though he participated not of the corruption, yet he felt the weakness of human nature. He felt the strength of passion. He is no stranger to the disturbance and commotion, which either the attacks of the world, or the powers of darkness, are able to raise within the breast of man. One remarkable difference, indeed, takes place between our temptations and those of Christ. Though he was *tempted like as we are, yet he was without sin*. Though the conflict was the same, the issue was different. We are often foiled; He always overcame. But his disconformity to us in this respect, is far from weakening the strength of our present argument. For sin contracts and hardens the heart. Every degree of guilt incurred by yielding to temptation, tends to debase the mind, and to weaken the generous and benevolent principles of human nature. If, from our Lord's being *tempted like as we are*, we
have

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have any ground to expect his sympathy ; from his being tempted, *yet without sin*, we are entitled to hope that his sympathy, unallayed and perfect, will operate with more complete energy.

FROM this view of the facts which are stated in the Text, I proceed to show how justly we may infer our Saviour's compassion, and in what manner it is to be accommodated to the consolation of good men amidst various exigencies of life.

It has been the universal opinion of mankind, that personal experience of suffering humanizes the heart. In the school of affliction, compassion is always supposed to be most thoroughly learned ; and hence, in the laws of Moses, when the Israelites are commanded not to oppress the stranger, this reason is given, *for you know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers yourselves in the land of Egypt*. The distressed, accordingly, fly for consolation to those who have been their companions in woe. They decline the prosperous, and look up to them with a suspicious

Exodus,
xxiii. 9.

picious eye. They consider them as ignorant of their feelings, and therefore regardless of their complaints. Amidst the manifold sorrows of life, then, how soothing is the thought, that our great Intercessor with God was a fellow-sufferer with ourselves, while he passed through this valley of tears.

But was it necessary for Christ, it may be said, to assume our nature in order to acquire the knowledge of its infirmity and distress? As a divine person, was he not perfectly acquainted with our frame before he descended to the earth? Did he stand in need of being prompted to compassion by the experience of our sorrows? Could his experimental knowledge of human weakness increase the benevolence of a nature which before was perfect?—No: he submitted to be *touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and to be tempted like as we are*; not in order to become acquainted with our nature, but to satisfy us that he knew it perfectly; not in order to acquire any new degree of goodness, but to give us the firmer confidence in the goodness which
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he possessed, and to convey the sense of it to our hearts with greater force and effect.

Distrust is a weakness peculiarly incident to the miserable. They are apt to reject hope, to indulge fear, and to tinge, with the dark colour of their own minds, every object which is offered for their encouragement. The representations given us of the Deity in Scripture, afford undoubtedly much ground for trust in his goodness. But the perfection of an Almighty Being, who dwelleth in the secret place of eternity, *whom no man hath seen or can see*, is overwhelming to a timid apprehension. The goodness which it promises, is a new and unknown form of goodness. Whatever proceeds from a nature so far superiour to our own, is beheld with a degree of awe, which is ready to overpower hope. Upon this account, under the Old Testament dispensation, the Supreme Being is often described with the attributes of a man, in order to give a shade and softening to his greatness, and to accommodate his goodness more to our capacity.

capacity. The relentings of a friend, the pity of a parent, and the sighs of a mourner, are ascribed to the Almighty. But we easily perceive such attributes to be no more than figures and allusions. The comfort which they afford, is not definite nor precise. They leave the mind under an anxious uncertainty, lest it err in its interpretation of those allegories of mercy. In the person of Jesus Christ, the object of our trust is brought nearer to ourselves; and of course adapted more effectually to our encouragement. Those well-known tender affections, which are only figuratively ascribed to the Divinity, are in our great Mediator thoroughly realized. His goodness is the goodness of human nature exalted and rendered perfect. It is that species of goodness with which we are best acquainted, compassion to the unhappy; and compassion cultivated by that discipline which we know to be the most powerful, the experience of sorrows.

For such reasons as these, *because the children are partakers of flesh and blood,*

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Christ himself likewise took part of the same.

In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful as well as a faithful high priest. When we consider his assumption of our nature in this light, what a mild and amiable aspect does it give to the government of Heaven! What attentive solicitude of goodness is shown in carrying on the dispensation of our redemption upon a plan so perfectly calculated to banish all distrust, and to revive the most timid and dejected heart! How naturally does that inference follow which the Apostle makes in the verse immediately succeeding the Text; let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need! More particularly, in consequence of the doctrine which I have illustrated, we are taught to hope,

I. THAT, under all our infirmities and errors, regard will be had to human imperfection; that a merciful distinction will be

be made between what is weak and what is wilfully criminal in our conduct ; and that such measures of obedience only will be exacted, as are proportioned to our circumstances and powers. What can more encourage our religious services, than to be assured that the God whom we worship, *knows our frame, and remembers we are dust* ; and that the Mediator, through whom we worship him, *is touched with the feeling of our infirmities* ? The most virtuous are the most apt to be dejected with the sense of their frailty. While vain and superficial men are easily flattered with favourable views of themselves, and fond hopes of divine acceptance, the slightest apprehension of guilt is ready to alarm the humble and delicate mind ; just as on coarse bodies an impression is not easily made, while those of finer contexture are soon hurt ; and as on an exquisite polish the least speck is visible. But though religion promotes great sensibility to all feelings of a moral nature, yet it gives no countenance to excessive and superstitious fears. That humility which checks pre-

sumption, and that jealousy which inspires vigilance, are favourable to piety; while those suspicions which lead to despondency are injurious to God, hurtful to ourselves, and repugnant to that whole system of mercy which I have been illustrating.

You complain, that when you engage in the solemn exercises of devotion, your spirits are depressed by a load of cares and sorrows; that in your thoughts there is no composure, and in your affections no elevation; that after your utmost essays, you are incapable of fixing your attention steadily on God, or of sending up your prayers to him with becoming warmth and fulness of heart. This debility and wandering of mind you are apt to impute to some uncommon degree of guilt. You consider it as the symptom of incurable hardness of heart, and as a melancholy proof of your being abandoned by God.—Such fears as these in a great measure refute themselves. If you were really obdurate, you would be insensible of guilt. Your complaints of hardness of heart, are an evidence of your heart being at that moment contrite and
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actually relenting.—Are there any circumstances of inward discomposure and perplexity, of which he is unconscious, who at a critical period of his life was *heavy and sore amazed*; who was obliged to complain that his soul was *troubled within him*; and to acknowledge that though *the spirit was willing, yet the flesh was weak*? To a superiour nature, untouched with human frailty, you might in such situations look up with some degree of terrour. But He, who remembers the struggles of his own soul, will not, surely, judge yours like a hard and unfeeling master. Acquainted with the inmost recesses of human nature, he perceives the sincerity of your intentions; he sees the combat you maintain; he knows how much of your present confusion and disorder is to be imputed, not to your inclination and will, but to an infirm, an aged or diseased body, or to a weak and wounded spirit; and therefore will be far from rejecting your attempts to serve him, on account of the infirmities which you lament. He hears the voice of those secret aspirations which you are unable to

Matk, xiv.
33.

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express in words, or to form into prayer.

Every penitential tear which your contrition sheds, pleads your cause more powerfully with him, than all the arguments with which you could fill your mouth.

II. FROM our Saviour's experience of human misery, we may justly hope that he will so compassionately regard our distressed estate, as to prevent us from being loaded with unnecessary troubles. He will not wantonly add affliction to the afflicted; nor willingly crush what he sees to be already broken. In the course of that high administration which he now exercises, he may indeed judge certain intermixtures of adversity to be proper for our improvement. These are trials of virtue through which all, without exception, must pass. Rugged was the road by which our divine Mediator himself went before us to glory; and by becoming our companion in distress, he meant to reconcile us to our lot. He ennobled adversity, by sharing it with us. He raised poverty from contempt, by assuming it for his own condition.

condition. The severity of his trials tends to lighten ours. When the general of an army lies on the same hard ground, drinks of the same cold stream, carries the same weight of armour with the lowest sentinel, can any of his soldiers repine at what they endure?

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Whatever afflictions our Lord may judge to be necessary for us, of this we may rest assured, that he will deal them forth, not with harsh and imperious authority, but with the tenderness of one who knows from experience how deeply the human heart is wounded by every stroke of adversity. He will not lay more upon us than he sees we are able to bear. *Though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his tender mercies. He will stay his rough wind in the day of the east wind:* For it is his state, but not his nature, which is now changed. Notwithstanding his high exaltation, he still retains the compassionate sentiments of *the man of sorrows*. Still, we are assured by an inspired writer, *he is not* ashamed to call us brethren. And with the

Isa. xxvii. 8.

Heb. li 11.

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heart of a brother, he regards those few and troubled days, such as his own once were, which good men are doomed to pass in this evil world.

From his compassion, indeed, we are not to expect that fond indulgence or unseasonable relief by which the weak pity of men frequently injures its objects. It is to the material interests, more than to the present ease, of good men, that he attends. When under the impatience of sorrow we exclaim, *Hath he forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?* we recollect not in whose hands we are. His compassion is not diminished, when its operations are most concealed. It continues equally to flow, though the channels by which it is conducted towards us lie too deep for our observation. Amidst our present ignorance of what is good or ill for us in this life, it is sufficient for us to know, that the immediate administration of universal government is placed in the hands of the most attentive and compassionate friend of mankind. How greatly does this consideration alleviate the
burden

burden of human woe ! How happily does it connect with the awful dispensations of religion the mildest ideas of tenderness and humanity !

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III. THE Text leads us to hope, that amidst all the infirmities of our state, both under the temptations and under the distresses of life, our Blessed Lord will afford us a proper measure of assistance and support. *In that he hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them who either suffer, or are tempted ;* that is, he is perfectly qualified for discharging this beneficent office ; he knows exactly where the wound bleeds, where the burden presses, what relief will prove most seasonable, and how it can be most successfully applied. The manner in which it is conveyed by him to the heart, we may be at a loss to explain ; but no argument can be thence drawn against the credibility of the fact. The operations which the power of God carries on in the natural world, are no less mysterious than those which we are taught to believe that his spirit performs in the
moral

Heb. ii. 18.

moral world. If we can give no account of what is every day before our eyes, how a seed becomes a tree, or how the child rises into a man, is it any wonder that we should be unable to explain how virtue is supported, and constancy strengthened by God within the heart? If men by their counsels and suggestions can influence the minds of one another, must not divine suggestion and counsel produce a much greater effect? Surely, the Father of Spirits must, by a thousand ways, have access to the spirits which he has made, so as to give them what determination, or impart to them what assistance he thinks proper, without injuring their frame, or disturbing their rational powers.

Accordingly, whenever any notions of religion have taken place among mankind, this belief has in some measure prevailed, that, to the virtuous under distress, aid was communicated from above. This sentiment is so congruous to our natural impressions of the divine benignity, that both among poets and philosophers of ancient times it was a favourite idea, and often
occurs

occurs in their writings. But what among them was no more than loose conjecture or feeble hope, has received full confirmation from the gospel of Christ. Not only is the promise of divine assistance expressly given to Christians, but their faith in that promise is strengthened by an argument which must carry conviction to every heart. If Christ had full experience of the insufficiency of human nature to overcome the difficulties wherewith it is now surrounded, will he withhold from his followers that grace without which he sees they must perish in the evil day? If, in the season of his temptation and distress, an angel was sent from heaven *to strengthen him*, shall no celestial messenger be employed by him on the like kind errand to those whom he styles his brethren? Can we believe that he who once *bore our griefs, and carried our sorrows*, will, from that height of glory to which he is now exalted, look down upon us here, contending with the storm of adversity, labouring to follow his steps through the steep and difficult paths

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Luke, xxii.
43.

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paths of virtue, exposed on every side to arrows aimed against us by the powers of darkness ; and that, seeing our distress and hearing our supplications, he will remain an unconcerned spectator, without vouchsafing us either assistance to support our frailty, or protection to screen us amidst surrounding dangers ? Where were then the benevolence of a divine Nature ? Where, the compassion of that Mediator who was trained to mercy in the school of sorrow ? Far from us be such ungrateful suspicions of the generous friend of human kind !—Let us exert ourselves as we can, and we shall be assisted. Let us pray, and we shall be heard ; for there is one to present our prayers, whom *the Father heareth always*. These, will he say, are my followers on earth, passing through that thorny path of temptation and sorrow which I once trod. *Now I am no more in the world ; but these are in the world. Holy Father ! thine they were, and thou gavest them me. Keep them through thine own name. Sanctify them through thy truth.*

John, xvii.

truth. Keep them from the evil one ; that they may be where I am, and may behold the glory which thou hast given me.

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v.

Such is the comfort which arises to us from our Saviour's participation of the infirmities of human nature ; and thus it may be applied to various situations of anxiety and distress.

WHEN we review what has been said, it is necessary that, in the first place, I guard you against a certain misimprovement which may be made of this doctrine. The amiable view which it gives of our Lord's clemency, may flatter some men with unwarrantable hopes, and lead them to imagine, that in his experience of human weakness an apology is to be found for every crime. Persons of this character must be taught, that his compassion differs widely from that undistinguishing and capricious indulgence which is sometimes found among men. It is the compassion of an impartial mind, enlightened by wisdom, and guided by justice, extending to the frailties of the sincere, but not to the
sins

sins of the presumptuous, and least of all to the crimes of those who encourage themselves in evil from the hope that they shall meet with compassion.

A course of deliberate guilt admits of no apology from the weakness of human nature. For, notwithstanding all the infirmities incident to it, no man is under a necessity of being wicked. So far is our Saviour's experience of our nature from affording any ground of hope to presumptuous offenders, that it ought to fill them with terror. For it shows them how thoroughly qualified he is to discriminate accurately the characters of men, and to mark the boundaries between frailty and perverseness. He who from his own feelings well knows all the workings of the human heart, clearly discerns how different their temper is from what was once his own. He perceives that vice, not virtue, is their choice ; and that, instead of resisting temptation, they resist conscience. He sees that infirmity affords them no excuse ; and that the real cause of their acting a criminal part, is not because they
cannot

cannot do better, but, in truth, because they will not. Having forfeited every title to compassion, they are left in the hands of justice ; and according *as they have sown*, they must expect *to reap*.

BUT, in the next place, to such as are sincere and upright, the doctrine which I have illustrated affords high encouragement, and powerfully recommends the Christian religion. It places that religion in its proper point of view, as a medicinal plan, intended both for the recovery of mankind from guilt, and for their consolation under trouble. *The law was given by Moses ; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.* The Law was a dispensation of mere authority. The Gospel is a dispensation, not of authority only, but of relief. If it discovers new duties and imposes new obligations, it opens also sources of comfort which were before unknown to the world.

A Mediator between God and his creatures, was an object after which men in all nations, and under all forms of religion,
had

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had long and anxiously sought. The follies of superstition have served to disclose to us, in this instance, the sentiments of nature. The whole religion of Paganism was a system of mediation and intercession. Depressed by a conscious sense of guilt, nature shrunk at the thought of adventuring on a direct approach to the Sovereign of the universe; and laboured to find out some auspicious introductor to that awful presence. With blind and trembling eagerness the nations fled to subordinate deities, to tutelar gods, and to departed spirits, as their patrons and advocates above. Then they studied to sooth with such costly gifts, such pompous rites, or such humble supplications, as they thought might incline them to favour their cause, and to support their interest with the Supreme Divinity. While mankind were bewildered in this darkness, the Gospel not only revealed the true Mediator, who in this view may be justly called *the desire of all nations*, but placed his character and office in a light most admirably

rably fitted, as has been shown in this Discourse, to support the interest of virtue in the world; and to encourage the humble, without flattering the presumptuous. What plan of religion could be more suited to the circumstances of man, or more worthy of the goodness of his Creator? What more animating to the pious worshipper, in performing those solemn acts of devotion to which we are called by the service of this day?

I CANNOT conclude without taking notice how remarkably this dispensation of religion is calculated to promote a spirit of humanity and compassion among men, by those very means which it employs for inspiring devotion towards God. We are now drawing nigh to the Supreme Being through a Mediator, for whose compassion we pray, on account of the experience which he has had of our frailty. We trust, that having been acquainted with distress, *he will not despise nor abhor the affliction of the afflicted.* The argument by which we plead for his compassion, concludes still

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more strongly for mutual charity, and sympathy with one another. He who, in the midst of the common sufferings of life, feels not for the distressed ; he who relents not at his neighbour's griefs, nor scans his failings with the eye of a brother, must be sensible that he excludes himself from the commiseration of Christ. He makes void the argument by which he pleads for his mercy ; nay, he establishes a precedent against himself. Thus the Christian religion approves itself as worthy of God, by connecting devotion in strict union with charity. As in its precepts the love of God and the love of man are joined, so in its institutions the exercise of both is called forth ; and to worship God through the mediation of a compassionate High Priest, necessarily supposes in the worshippers a spirit of compassion towards their own brethren.

SERMON VI.

On the LOVE of PRAISE.

JOHN, xii. 43.

*For they loved the praise of men more than
the praise of God.*

THE state of man on earth, is manifestly designed for the trial of his virtue. Temptations every where occur; and perpetual vigilance and attention are required. There is no passion, or principle of action in his nature, which may not, if left to itself, betray him into some criminal excess. Corruption gains entrance, not only by those passions which are apparently of dangerous tendency, such as covetousness, and love of pleasure; but by means of those also which are seemingly the most fair and innocent, such as the desire of esteem

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and praise. Of this the Text suggests a remarkable instance. When our Lord appeared in the land of Judea, the purity of his doctrine, and the evidence of his miracles, procured him a considerable number of followers, chiefly among the lower classes of men. But the Pharisees, who were the leading and fashionable sect, galled with the freedom of his reproofs, decried him as an impostor. Hence it came to pass, that though *some of the rulers believed in him, yet, because of the Pharisees, they did not confess him*. Rulers, persons who, by their rank and education, ought to have been superiour to any popular prejudice, were so far overawed by the opinions of others, as to stifle their conviction, to dissemble their faith, and to join with the prevailing party, in condemning one whom in their hearts they revered: for which this reason is given, that *they loved the praise of men, more than the praise of God*. Since, then, the love of praise can mislead men into such culpable and dishonest conduct, let us, with some attention, examine the nature of this passion. Let us consider

sider how far it is an allowable principle of action ; when it begins to be criminal ; and upon what accounts we ought to guard against its acquiring the entire ascendant.

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WE are intended by Providence to be connected with one another in society. Single unassisted individuals could make small advances towards any valuable improvement. By means of society our wants are supplied, and our lives rendered comfortable ; our capacities are enlarged, and our virtuous affections called forth into proper exercise. In order to confirm our mutual connexion, it was necessary that some attracting power, which had the effect of drawing men together, and strengthening the social ties, should pervade the human system. Nothing could more happily fulfil this purpose, than our being so formed as to desire the esteem, and to delight in the good opinion, of each other. Had such a propensity been wanting, and selfish principles left to occupy its place, society must have proved an unharmonious

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and discordant state. Instead of mutual attraction, a repulsive power would have prevailed. Among men who had no regard to the approbation of one another, all intercourse would have been jarring and offensive. For the wisest ends, therefore, the desire of praise was made an original and powerful principle in the human breast.

To a variety of good purposes it is subservient, and on many occasions co-operates with the principle of virtue. It awakens us from sloth, invigorates activity, and stimulates our efforts to excel. It has given rise to most of the splendid, and to many of the useful enterprises of men. It has animated the patriot, and fired the hero. Magnanimity, generosity, and fortitude are what all mankind admire. Hence such as were actuated by the desire of extensive fame, have been prompted to deeds which either participated of the spirit, or, at least, carried the appearance of distinguished virtue. The desire of praise is generally connected with all the finer sensibilities of human nature. It affords a
ground

ground on which exhortation, counsel, and reproof, can work a proper effect. Whereas to be entirely destitute of this passion, betokens an ignoble mind, on which no moral impression is easily made. Where there is no desire of praise, there will be also no sense of reproach; and if that be extinguished, one of the principal guards of virtue is removed, and the path opened to many opprobrious pursuits. He whose countenance never glowed with shame, and whose heart never beat at the sound of praise, is not destined for any honourable distinction; is likely to grovel in the sordid quest of gain, or to slumber life away in the indolence of selfish pleasures.

Abstracting from the sentiments which are connected with the love of praise as a principle of action, the esteem of our fellow-creatures is an object which, on account of the advantages it brings, may be lawfully pursued. It is necessary to our success in every fair and honest undertaking. Not only our private interest, but our public usefulness, depends in a great measure upon it. The sphere of our in-

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fluence is contracted or enlarged in proportion to the degree in which we enjoy the good opinion of the public. Men listen with an unwilling ear to one whom they do not honour ; while a respected character adds weight to example, and authority to counsel. To desire the esteem of others for the sake of its effects, is not only allowable, but in many cases is our duty ; and to be totally indifferent to praise or censure, is so far from being a virtue, that it is a real defect in character.

BUT while the love of praise is admitted to be a natural, and, in so many respects, an useful principle of action, we are to observe, that it is entitled to no more than our secondary regard. It has its boundary set ; by transgressing which, it is at once transformed from an innocent into a most dangerous passion. More sacred and venerable principles claim the chief direction of human conduct. All the good effects which we have ascribed to the desire of praise, are produced by it when remaining in a subordinate station.

But

But when, passing its natural line, it becomes the ruling spring of conduct ; when the regard which we pay to the opinions of men, encroaches on that reverence which we owe to the voice of conscience and the sense of duty ; the love of praise having then gone out of its proper place, instead of improving, corrupts ; and instead of elevating, debases our nature. The proportion which this passion holds to other principles of action, is what renders it either innocent or criminal. The crime with which the Jewish rulers are charged in the Text, was not that they loved the praise of men ; but that they loved it *more than the praise of God*.

Even in cases where there is no direct competition between our duty and our fancied honour, between the praise of men and the praise of God, the passion for applause may become criminal, by occupying the place of a better principle. When vain-glory usurps the throne of virtue ; when ostentation produces actions which conscience ought to have dictated ; such actions, however specious, have no claim
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to moral or religious praise. We know that good deeds, done merely *to be seen of men*, lose their reward with God. If, on occasion of some trying conjuncture, which makes us hesitate concerning our line of conduct, the first question which occurs to us be, not whether an action is right in itself, and such as a good man ought to perform, but whether it is such as will find acceptance with the world, and be favourable to our fame, the conclusion is too evident, that the desire of applause has obtained an undue ascendant. What a wise and good man ought to study, is to preserve his mind free from any such solicitude concerning praise, as may be in hazard of overcoming his sense of duty. The approbation of men he may wish to obtain, as far as is consistent with the approbation of God. But when both cannot be enjoyed together, there ought to be no suspense. He is to retire, contented with the testimony of a good conscience; and to show, by the firmness of his behaviour, that, in the cause of truth and virtue, he is superiour to all opinion.—Let us now proceed

ceed to consider the arguments which should support such a spirit, and guard us against the improper influence of praise or censure in the course of our duty.

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IN the first place, the praise of men is not an object of such value in itself, as to be entitled to become the leading principle of conduct. We degrade our character, when we allow it more than subordinate regard. Like other worldly goods, it is apt to dazzle us with a false lustre; but if we would ascertain its true worth, let us reflect both on whom it is bestowed, and from whom it proceeds. Were the applause of the world, always the reward of merit; were it appropriated to such alone as by real abilities, or by worthy actions, are entitled to rise above the crowd, we might justly be flattered by possessing a rare and valuable distinction. But, how far is this from being the case in fact? How often have the despicable and the vile, by dexterously catching the favour of the multitude, soared upon the wings of popular applause, while the virtuous and the deserving

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ing have been either buried in obscurity, or obliged to encounter the attacks of unjust reproach? The laurels which human praise confers, are withered and blasted by the unworthiness of those who wear them. Let the man who is vain of public favour be humbled, by the reflection that, in the midst of his success, he is mingled with a crowd of impostors and deceivers, of hypocrites and enthusiasts, of ignorant pretenders and superficial reasoners, who, by various arts, have attained as high a rank as himself in temporary fame.

We may easily be satisfied that applause will be often shared by the undeserving, if we allow ourselves to consider from whom it proceeds. When it is the approbation of the wise only, and the good, which is pursued, the love of praise may then be accounted to contain itself within just bounds, and to run in its proper channel. But the testimony of the discerning few, modest and unassuming as they commonly are, forms but a small part of the public voice. It seldom amounts to more than a whisper, which amidst the general clamour
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is drowned. When the love of praise has taken possession of the mind, it confines not itself to an object so limited. It grows into an appetite for indiscriminate praise. And who are they that confer this praise? A mixed multitude of men, who in their whole conduct are guided by humour and caprice, far more than by reason; who admire false appearances, and pursue false gods; who inquire superficially, and judge rashly; whose sentiments are for the most part erroneous, always changeable, and often inconsistent. Nor let any one imagine, that by looking above the crowd, and courting the praise of the fashionable and the great, he makes sure of true honour. There are a great vulgar, as well as a small. Rank often makes no difference in the understandings of men, or in their judicious distribution of praise. Luxury, pride, and vanity, have frequently as much influence in corrupting the sentiments of the great, as ignorance, bigotry, and prejudice, have in misleading the opinions of the crowd.— And is it to such judges as these that you submit the supreme direction of your conduct?

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duct? Do you stoop to court their favour as your chief distinction, when an object of so much juster and higher ambition is presented to you *in the praise of God*? God is the only unerring Judge of what is excellent. His approbation alone is the substance, all other praise is but the shadow, of honour. The character which you bear in his sight, is your only real one. How contemptible does it render you, to be indifferent with respect to this, and to be solicitous about a name alone, a fictitious, imaginary character, which has no existence except in the opinions of a few weak and credulous men around you? They see no farther than the outside of things. They can judge of you by actions only; and not by the comprehensive view of all your actions, but by such merely as you have had opportunity of bringing forth to public notice. But the Sovereign of the world beholds you in every light in which you can be placed. The silent virtues of a generous purpose, and a pious heart, attract his notice, equally with the most splendid deeds. From him you may reap the praise of good
actions

actions which you had no opportunity of performing. For he sees them in their principle ; he judges of you by your intentions ; he knows what you would have done. You may be in his eyes a hero or a martyr, without undergoing the labours of the one, or the sufferings of the other. His inspection, therefore, opens a much wider field for praise, than what the world can afford you ; and for praise, too, certainly far more illustrious in the eye of reason. Every real artist studies to approve himself to such as are knowing in his art. To their judgment he appeals. On their approbation he rests his character, and not on the praise of the unskilled and rude. In the highest art of all, that of life and conduct, shall the opinions of ignorant men come into the most distant competition with his approbation, who is the searcher of all hearts, and the standard of all perfection ?—The testimony of his praise is not indeed, as yet, openly bestowed. But though the voice of the Almighty sound not in your ears, yet by conscience, his sacred vicegerent, it is capable of
being



being conveyed to your heart. The softest whisper of divine approbation is sweeter to the soul of a virtuous man, than the loudest shouts of that tumultuary applause which proceeds from the world.

Consider, farther, how narrow and circumscribed in its limits that fame is, which the vain-glorious man so eagerly pursues. In order to show him this, I shall not bid him reflect that it is confined to a small district of the earth; and that when he looks a little beyond the region which he inhabits, he will find himself as much unknown as the most obscure person around him. I shall not desire him to consider, that in the gulph of oblivion, where all human memorials are swallowed up, his name and fame must soon be inevitably lost. He may imagine that ample honours remain to gratify ambition, though his reputation extend not over the whole globe, nor last till the end of time. But let him calmly reflect, that within the narrow boundaries of that country to which he belongs, and during that small portion
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of time which his life fills up, his reputation, great as he may fancy it to be, occupies no more than an inconsiderable corner. Let him think what multitudes of those among whom he dwells, are totally ignorant of his name and character; how many imagine themselves too important to regard him; how many are too much occupied with their own wants and pursuits, to pay him the least attention; and where his reputation is in any degree spread, how often it has been attacked, and how many rivals are daily rising to abate it: Having attended to these circumstances, he will find sufficient materials for humiliation in the midst of the highest applause.—From all these considerations it clearly appears, that though the esteem of our fellow-creatures be pleasing, and the pursuit of it, in a moderate degree, be fair and lawful, yet that it affords no such object to desire, as entitles it to be a ruling principle.

IN the second place, an excessive love of praise never fails to undermine the regard due to conscience, and to corrupt the

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heart. It turns off the eye of the mind from the ends which it ought chiefly to keep in view ; and sets up a false light for its guide. Its influence is the more dangerous, as the colour which it assumes is often fair ; and its garb and appearance are nearly allied to that of virtue. The love of glory, I before admitted, may give birth to actions which are both splendid and useful. At a distance, they strike the eye with uncommon brightness ; but, on a nearer and stricter survey, their lustre is often tarnished. They are found to want that sacred and venerable dignity which characterises true virtue. Little passions and selfish interests entered into the motives of those who performed them. They were jealous of a competitor. They sought to humble a rival. They looked round for spectators to admire them. All is magnanimity, generosity, and courage, to public view. But the ignoble source whence these seeming virtues take their rise, is hidden. Without, appears the hero ; within, is found the man of dust and clay. Consult such as have been intimately connected

nected with the followers of renown ; and seldom or never will you find that they held them in the same esteem with those who viewed them from afar. There is nothing, except simplicity of intention, and purity of principle, that can stand the test of near approach and strict examination.

But, supposing the virtue of vain-glorious men not to be always false, it certainly cannot be depended upon as firm or sure. Constancy and steadiness are to be looked for from him only whose conduct is regulated by a sense of what is right ; *whose praise is not of men, but of God* ; whose motive to discharge his duty is always the same. Change as much as you please, the situation of such a man ; let applause or let censure be his lot ; let the public voice, which this day has extolled him, to-morrow as loudly decry him ; on the tenour of his behaviour these changes produce no effect. He moves in a higher sphere. As the sun in his orbit is not interrupted by the mists and storms of the atmosphere below ; so, regardless of the opinions of men, *through*
M 2 *honour*

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honour and dishonour, through good report and bad report, he pursues the path which conscience has marked out. Whereas the apparent virtues of that man whose eye is fixed on the world, are precarious and temporary. Supported only by circumstances, occasions, and particular regards, they fluctuate and fall with these. Excited by public admiration, they disappear when it is withdrawn; like those exhalations which, raised by heat from the earth, glitter in the air with momentary splendour, and then fall back to the ground from whence they sprung.

The intemperate love of praise not only weakens the true principles of probity, by substituting inferiour motives in their stead, but frequently also impels men to actions which are directly criminal. It obliges them to follow the current of popular opinion whithersoever it may carry them; and hence *shipwreck* is often made both *of faith and of a good conscience*. According as circumstances lead them to court the acclamations of the multitude, or to pursue the applause of the great, vices of different

ferent kinds will stain their character. In one situation, they will make hypocritical professions of religion. In another, they will be ashamed of their Redeemer, and of his words. They will be afraid to appear in their own form, or to utter their genuine sentiments. Their whole character will become fictitious, opinions will be assumed, speech and behaviour modelled, and even the countenance formed, as prevailing taste exacts. From one who has submitted to such prostitution for the sake of praise, you can no longer expect fidelity or attachment on any trying occasion. In private life, he will be a timorous and treacherous friend. In public conduct, he will be supple and versatile; ready to desert the cause which he had espoused, and to veer with every shifting wind of popular favour. In fine, all becomes unsound and hollow in that heart, where, instead of regard to the divine approbation, there reigns the sovereign desire of pleasing men.

IN the third place, this passion, when it becomes predominant, most commonly de-

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feats its own end, and deprives men of the honour which they are so eager to gain. Without preserving liberty and independence, we can never command respect. That servility of spirit which subjects us to the opinion of others, and renders us tributaries to the world for the sake of applause, is what all mankind despise. They look up with reverence to one who, un-awed by their censures, acts according to his own sense of things, and follows the free impulse of an honourable mind. But him who hangs totally on their judgment, they consider as their vassal. They even enjoy a malignant pleasure in humbling his vanity, and withholding that praise which he is seen to court. By artifice and show, he may shine for a time in the public eye ; but it is only as long as he can support the belief of acting from principle. When the inconsistencies into which he falls detect his character, his reputation passes away like the pageant of a day. No man ever obtained lasting fame, who did not, on several occasions, contradict the prejudices of popular opinion.

There

There is no course of behaviour which will at all times please all men. That which pleases most generally, and which only commands durable praise, is religion and virtue. Sincere piety towards God, kind affection to men, and fidelity in the discharge of all the duties of life ; a conscience pure and undefiled ; a heart firm to justice and to truth, superiour to all terrors that would shake, and insensible of all pleasures that would betray it ; unconquerable by the opposition of the world, and resigned to God alone : these are the qualities which render a man truly respectable and great. Such a character may, in evil times, incur unjust reproach. But the clouds which envy or prejudice has gathered around it, will gradually disperse ; and its brightness will come forth, in the end, as the noon day. As soon as it is thoroughly known, it finds a witness in every breast. It forces approbation even from the most degenerate. The human heart is so formed as to be attuned, if we may use the expression, to its praise. In fact, it is this firm and inflexible virtue, this determined re-

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Wisdom of
Solomon,
iv. 1, 2.

gard to principle beyond all opinion, which has crowned the characters of such as now stand highest in the rolls of lasting fame. The truly illustrious are they who did not court the praise of the world, but who performed the actions which deserved it. They were perhaps traduced in their life-time by those whom they opposed. But posterity has done them ample justice ; and they are the men whom the voice of ages now concurs in celebrating. *The memorial of virtue is immortal ; because it is approved of God and of men. When it is present, men take example at it ; and when it is gone, they desire it. It weareth a crown, and triumpheth for ever ; having gotten the victory ; striving for undefiled rewards.*

IN the fourth place, as an immoderate passion for human praise is dangerous to virtue, and unfavourable to true honour ; so it is destructive of self-enjoyment and inward peace. Regard to the praise of God prescribes a simple and consistent tenour of conduct, which in all situations is the same ; which engages us in no perplexities,

plexities, and requires no artful refinement. *Walking uprightly, we walk surely*, because we tread an even and open path. But he who turns aside from the straight road of duty, in order to gain applause, involves himself in an intricate labyrinth. He will be often embarrassed concerning the course which he ought to hold. His mind will be always on the stretch. He will be obliged to listen with anxious attention to every whisper of the popular voice. The demands of those masters whom he has submitted to serve, will prove frequently contradictory and inconsistent. He has prepared a yoke for his neck, which he must resolve to bear, how much soever it may gall him.

The toils of virtue are honourable. The mind is supported under them by the consciousness of acting a right and becoming part. But the labours to which he is doomed who is enslaved to the desire of praise, are aggravated by reflection both on the uncertainty of the recompence which he pursues, and on the debasement to which he submits. Conscience will, from
time

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time to time, remind him of the improper sacrifices which he has made, and of the forfeiture which he has incurred, of the praise of God for the sake of praise from men. Suppose him to receive all the rewards which the mistaken opinion of the world can bestow, its loudest applause will often be unable to drown the upbraidings of an inward voice; and if a man is reduced to be ashamed of himself, what avails it him to be caressed by others?

But, in truth, the reward towards which he looks who proposes human praise as his ultimate object, will be always flying, like a shadow, before him. So capricious and uncertain, so fickle and mutable, is the favour of the multitude, that it proves the most unsatisfactory of all pursuits in which men can be engaged. He who sets his heart on it, is preparing for himself perpetual mortifications. If the greatest and best can seldom retain it long, we may easily believe, that from the vain and undeserving it will suddenly escape. There is no character but what on some side is vulnerable by censure. He who lifts him-
self

self up to the observation and notice of the world, is, of all men, the least likely to avoid it. For he draws upon himself a thousand eyes, that will narrowly inspect him in every part. Every opportunity will be watched, of bringing him down to the common level. His errors will be more divulged, and his infirmities more magnified, than those of others. In proportion to his eagerness for praise, will be his sensibility to reproach. Nor is it reproach alone that will wound him. He will be as much dejected by silence and neglect. He puts himself under the power of every one to humble him, by withholding expected praise. Even when praise is bestowed, he is mortified by its being either faint or trite. He pines when his reputation stagnates. The degree of applause to which he has been accustomed, grows insipid ; and to be always praised from the same topics, becomes at last much the same with not being praised at all.

All these chagrins and inquietudes are happily avoided by him who keeps so troublesome a passion within its due bounds ;

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bounds; who is more desirous of being truly worthy, than of being thought so; who pursues the praise of the world with manly temperance, and in subordination to the praise of God. He is neither made giddy by the intoxicating vapour of applause, nor humbled and cast down by the unmerited attacks of censure. Resting on a higher approbation, he enjoys himself, in peace, whether human praise stays with him, or flies away. *With me it is a small thing to be judged of you, or of man's judgment. He that judgeth me is the Lord. My witness is in heaven, and my record is on high.*

IN the fifth and last place, the advantages which redound from the praise of men, are not such as can bear to be put in competition with those which flow from the praise of God. The former are necessarily confined within the verge of our present existence. The latter follow us beyond the grave, and extend through all eternity. Not only is the praise of men limited in its effects to this life, but also to particular

particular situations of it. In the days of health and ease, it may brighten the sunshine of prosperity. It may then sooth the ear with pleasing accents, and gratify the imagination with fancied triumphs. But when the distressful seasons of life arrive, it will be found altogether hollow and unsubstantial: And surely, the value of any possession is to be chiefly estimated by the relief which it can bring us, in the time of our greatest need. When the mind is cast down with sorrow and grief, when sickness spreads its gloom around us, or death rises in awful prospect to our view, the opinions and the discourses of the world will appear trifling and insignificant. To one who is occupied with nearer and more affecting interests, the praise or the censure of the world will seem like the noise of distant voices, in which he has small concern. But then is the season when the praise of God supports and upholds the labouring soul. Brought home to the heart by the testimony of a good conscience, and by the *divine Spirit bearing witness*

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witness with our spirits, it inspires fortitude, and produces a peace which passeth understanding.

At present, we behold an irregular and disordered state of things. Virtue is often deprived of its proper honours, and vice usurps them in its stead. The characters of men are mistaken; and ignorance and folly dispose of human applause. But the day hastens apace, which shall close this scene of errors, and vindicate the rights of justice and truth. *Then shall be rendered to every man according to his works.* Envy shall no longer have the power of obscuring merit, nor popular prejudices be able to support the undeserving. Hidden worth shall be brought to light, and secret crimes revealed. Many who passed through the world in the silent obscurity of humble but steady goodness, shall be distinguished as the favourites of Heaven; while the proud, the ambitious, and the vain, are left to everlasting dishonour. The great Judge hath declared, that *whosoever hath been ashamed of him and of his words, of that man*

man shall he be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with all the holy angels. Every departure from duty shall, at the period of final retribution, terminate in ignominy. True honour and true virtue shall be seen to coincide; and when all human fame has passed away like smoke, the only praise which shall be for ever remembered is that divine testimony, Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.

THESE arguments clearly show the importance of preserving the love of praise under proper subordination to the principle of duty. In itself, it is an useful motive to action; but when allowed to extend its influence too far, it corrupts the whole character, and produces guilt, disgrace, and misery. To be entirely destitute of it, is a defect. To be governed by it, is depravity. The proper adjustment of the several principles of action in human nature, is a matter that deserves our highest attention. For when any one of them becomes either too

weak

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weak or too strong, it endangers both our virtue and our happiness. *Keep thy heart therefore with all diligence; pray that God would enable thee to keep it with success; for out of the heart are the issues of life.*

SERMON VII.

On the proper ESTIMATE of HUMAN LIFE.

ECCLESIASTES, xii. 8.

*Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, all
is vanity.*

NO serious maxim has been more generally adopted, than that of the Text. In every age, the vanity of human life has been the theme of declamation, and the subject of complaint. It is a conclusion in which men of all characters and ranks, the high and the low, the young and the old, the religious and the worldly, have more frequently concurred, than in any other. But how just soever the conclusion may be, the premises which lead to it are often false. For it is prompted by various motives, and derived from very differ-

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ent views of things. Sometimes the language of the Text is assumed by a sceptic, who cavils at Providence, and censures the constitution of the world. Sometimes it is the complaint of a peevish man, who is discontented with his station, and ruffled by the disappointment of unreasonable hopes. Sometimes it is the style of the licentious, when groaning under miseries in which their vices have involved them. Invectives against the vanity of the world which come from any of these quarters deserve no regard; as they are the dictates of impiety, of spleen, or of folly. The only case in which the sentiment of the Text claims our attention is, when uttered, not as an aspersion on Providence, or a reflection on human affairs in general; not as the language of private discontent, or the result of guilty sufferings; but as the sober conclusion of a wise and good man, concerning the imperfection of that happiness which rests solely on worldly pleasures. These, in their fairest form, are not what they seem to be. They never bestow that complete satisfaction which they promise; and

and therefore he who looks to nothing beyond them, shall have frequent cause to deplore their vanity.

Nothing is of higher importance to us, as men and as Christians, than to form a proper estimate of human life, without either loading it with imaginary evils, or expecting from it greater advantages than it is able to yield. It shall be my business, therefore, in this Discourse, to distinguish a just and religious sense of the vanity of the world, from the unreasonable complaints of it which we often hear. I shall endeavour, I. To show in what sense it is true that all earthly pleasures are vanity. II. To inquire, how this vanity of the world can be reconciled with the perfections of its great Author. III. To examine, whether there are not some real and solid enjoyments in human life, which fall not under this general charge of vanity. And, IV. To point out the proper improvement to be made of such a state as the life of man shall appear on the whole to be.

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I. I AM to show, in what sense it is true that all human pleasures are vanity. This is a topic which might be embellished with the pomp of much description. But I shall studiously avoid exaggeration, and only point out a threefold vanity in human life, which every impartial observer cannot but admit; disappointment in pursuit, dissatisfaction in enjoyment, uncertainty in possession.

First, Disappointment in pursuit. When we look around us on the world, we every where behold a busy multitude, intent on the prosecution of various designs which their wants or desires have suggested. We behold them employing every method which ingenuity can devise, some the patience of industry, some the boldness of enterprise, others the dexterity of stratagem, in order to compass their ends. Of this incessant stir and activity, what is the fruit? In comparison of the crowd who have toiled in vain, how small is the number of the successful? Or rather, where is the man who will declare, that in every point he has completed his plan, and attained

tained his utmost wish? No extent of human abilities has been able to discover a path, which, in any line of life, leads unerringly to success. *The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor riches to men of understanding.* We may form our plans with the most profound sagacity, and with the most vigilant caution may guard against dangers on every side. But some unforeseen occurrence comes across, which baffles our wisdom, and lays our labours in the dust.

Were such disappointments confined to those who aspire at engrossing the higher departments of life, the misfortune would be less. The humiliation of the mighty, and the fall of ambition from its towering height, little concern the bulk of mankind. These are objects on which, as on distant meteors, they gaze from afar, without drawing personal instruction from events so much above them. But, alas! when we descend into the regions of private life, we find disappointment and blasted hope equally prevalent there. Neither the moderation of our views, nor the jus-

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But *time and chance happen to all*. Against the stream of events, both the worthy and the undeserving are obliged to struggle; and both are frequently overborne alike by the current.

BESIDES disappointment in pursuit, dissatisfaction in enjoyment is a farther vanity to which the human state is subject. This is the severest of all mortifications; after having been successful in the pursuit, to be baffled in the enjoyment itself. Yet this is found to be an evil still more general than the former. Some may be so fortunate as to attain what they have pursued; but none are rendered completely happy by what they have attained. Disappointed hope is misery; and yet successful hope is only imperfect bliss. Look through all the ranks of mankind. Examine the condition of those who appear most prosperous; and you will find that they are never just what they desire to be. If retired, they languish for action; if busy, they complain of fatigue. If in middle life, they are impatient

impatient for distinction ; if in high stations, they sigh after freedom and ease. Something is still wanting to that plenitude of satisfaction which they expected to acquire. Together with every wish that is gratified, a new demand arises. One void opens in the heart, as another is filled. On wishes, wishes grow ; and to the end, it is rather the expectation of what they have not, than the enjoyment of what they have, which occupies and interests the most successful.

This dissatisfaction, in the midst of human pleasure, springs partly from the nature of our enjoyments themselves, and partly from circumstances which corrupt them. No worldly enjoyments are adequate to the high desires and powers of an immortal spirit. Fancy paints them at a distance with splendid colours ; but possession unveils the fallacy. The eagerness of passion bestows upon them at first a brisk and lively relish. But it is their fate always to pall by familiarity, and sometimes to pass from satiety into disgust. Happy would the poor man think himself if he

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could enter on all the treasures of the rich; and happy for a short while he might be; but before he had long contemplated and admired his state, his possessions would seem to lessen, and his cares would grow.

Add to the unsatisfying nature of our pleasures, the attending circumstances which never fail to corrupt them. For, such as they are, they are at no time possessed unmixed. To human lips it is not given to taste the cup of pure joy. When external circumstances show fairest to the world, the envied man groans in private under his own burden. Some vexation disquiets, some passion corrodes him; some distress, either felt or feared, gnaws, like a worm, the root of his felicity. When there is nothing from without to disturb the prosperous, a secret poison operates within. For worldly happiness ever tends to destroy itself, by corrupting the heart. It fosters the loose and the violent passions. It engenders noxious habits; and taints the mind with a false delicacy, which makes it feel a thousand unreal evils.

BUT

BUT put the case in the most favourable light. Lay aside from human pleasures both disappointment in pursuit, and deceitfulness in enjoyment; suppose them to be fully attainable, and completely satisfactory; still there remains to be considered the vanity of uncertain possession and short duration. Were there in worldly things any fixed point of security which we could gain, the mind would then have some basis on which to rest. But our condition is such, that every thing wavers and totters around us. *Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.* It is much if, during its course, thou hearest not of somewhat to disquiet or alarm thee. For life never proceeds long in an uniform train. It is continually varied by unexpected events. The seeds of alteration are every where sown; and the sunshine of prosperity commonly accelerates their growth. If your enjoyments be numerous, you lie more open on different sides to be wounded. If you have possessed them long, you have greater cause to dread an approaching change. By slow degrees

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degrees prosperity rises ; but rapid is the progress of evil. It requires no preparation to bring it forward. The edifice which it costs much time and labour to erect, one inauspicious event, one sudden blow, can level with the dust. Even supposing the accidents of life to leave us untouched, human bliss must still be transitory ; for man changes of himself. No course of enjoyment can delight us long. What amused our youth, loses its charm in maturer age. As years advance, our powers are blunted, and our pleasurable feelings decline. The silent lapse of time is ever carrying somewhat from us, till at length the period comes when all must be swept away. The prospect of this termination of our labours and pursuits is sufficient to mark our state with vanity. *Our days are a hand-breath, and our age is as nothing.* Within that little space is all our enterprise bounded. We crowd it with toils and care, with contention and strife. We project great designs, entertain high hopes, and then leave our plans unfinished, and sink into oblivion.

Thus

Thus much let it suffice to have said concerning the vanity of the world. That too much has not been said, must appear to every one who considers how generally mankind lean to the opposite side; and how often, by undue attachment to the present state, they both feed the most sinful passions, *and pierce themselves through with many sorrows*. Let us proceed to inquire,

II. How this vanity of the world can be reconciled with the perfections of its divine Author. This inquiry involves that great difficulty which has perplexed the thoughtful and serious in every age: If God be good, whence the evil that fills the earth? In answer to this interesting question, let us observe,

In the first place, That the present condition of man was not his original or primary state. We are informed by divine revelation, that it is the consequence of his voluntary apostacy from God and a state of innocence. By this, his nature was corrupted; his powers were enfeebled; and
vanity

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vanity and vexation introduced into his life. All nature became involved in the condemnation of man. The earth was cursed upon his account, and the whole creation made to *groan and travail in pain*.

How mysterious soever the account of this fall may appear to us, many circumstances concur to authenticate the fact, and to show that human nature and the human state have undergone an unhappy change. The belief of this has obtained in almost all nations and religions. It can be traced through all the fables of antiquity. An obscure tradition appears to have pervaded the whole earth, that man is not now what he was at first; but that in consequence of some transgression against his great Lord, a state of degradation and exile succeeded to a condition that was more flourishing and happy. As our nature carries plain marks of perversion and disorder, so the world which we inhabit bears the symptoms of having been convulsed in all its frame. Naturalists point out to us every where the traces of some violent change which it has suffered.

Islands

Islands torn from the continent, burning mountains, shattered precipices, uninhabitable wastes, give it all the appearance of a mighty ruin. The physical and moral state of man in this world mutually sympathize and correspond. They indicate not a regular and orderly structure, either of matter or of mind, but the remains of somewhat that was once more fair and magnificent. Let us observe,

IN the second place, That as this was not the original, so it is not intended to be the final, state of man. Though, in consequence of the abuse of the human powers, sin and vanity were introduced into this region of the universe, it was not the purpose of the Creator that they should be permitted to reign for ever. He hath made ample provision for the recovery of the penitent and faithful part of his subjects, by the merciful undertaking of that great Restorer of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ. By him *life and immortality were both purchased and brought to light. The new heavens and the new earth* are discovered,
wherein

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wherein dwelleth righteousness; where, through the divine grace, human nature shall regain its original honours, and man shall return to be what once he was in Paradise. 'Through those high discoveries of the Gospel, this life appears to good men only in the light of an intermediate and preparatory state. Its vanity and misery, in a manner, disappear. 'They have every reason to submit without complaint to its laws, and to wait in patience till the appointed time come for *the restitution of all things*. Let us take notice,

IN the third place, 'That a future state being made known, we can account in a satisfying manner for the present distress of human life, without the smallest impeachment of divine goodness. 'The sufferings we here undergo are converted into discipline and improvement. Through the blessing of Heaven, good is extracted from apparent evil; and the very misery which originated from sin, is rendered the means of correcting sinful passions, and preparing us for felicity. 'There is much reason to believe

believe that creatures as imperfect as we are, require some such preliminary state of experience before they can recover the perfection of their nature. It is in the midst of disappointments and trials that we learn the insufficiency of temporal things to happiness, and are taught to seek it from God and Virtue. By these the violence of our passions is tamed, and our minds are formed to sobriety and reflection. In the varieties of life, occasioned by the vicissitude of worldly fortune, we are inured to habits both of the active and the suffering virtues. How much soever we complain of the vanity of the world, facts plainly show, that if its vanity were less, it could not answer the purpose of salutary discipline. Unsatisfactory as it is, its pleasures are still too apt to corrupt our hearts. How fatal then must the consequences have been, had it yielded us more complete enjoyment? If, with all its troubles, we are in danger of being too much attached to it, how entirely would it have seduced our affections, if no troubles had been mingled with its pleasures?

These

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These observations serve in a great measure to obviate the difficulties which arise from the apparent vanity of the human state, by showing how, upon the Christian system, that vanity may be reconciled with the infinite goodness of the Sovereign of the universe. The present condition of man is not that for which he was originally designed ; it is not to be his final state ; and during his passage through the world, the distresses which he undergoes are rendered medicinal and improving. After having taken this view of things, the cloud, which in the preceding part of the Discourse appeared to sit so thick upon human life, begins to be dissipated. We now perceive that man is not abandoned by his Creator. We discern great and good designs going on in his behalf. We are allowed to entertain better hopes ; and are encouraged to inquire, as was proposed for the

III^d HEAD of discourse, Whether there be not, in the present condition of human life, some real and solid enjoyments which
come

come not under the general charge of *vanity of vanities*. The doctrine of the Text is to be considered as chiefly addressed to worldly men. Them Solomon means to teach, that all expectations of bliss, which rest solely on earthly possessions and pleasures, shall end in disappointment. But surely he did not intend to assert, that there is no material difference in the pursuits of men, or that no real happiness of any kind could now be attained by the virtuous. For, besides the unanswerable objection which this would form against the divine administration, it would directly contradict what he elsewhere asserts, that while *God giveth sore travail to the sinner, he giveth to the man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy*. It may, it must indeed be admitted, that unmixed and complete happiness is unknown on earth. No regulation of conduct can altogether prevent passions from disturbing our peace, and misfortunes from wounding our heart. But after this concession is made, will it follow that there is no object on earth which deserves our pursuit, or that

Eccles. ii.
26.

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all enjoyment becomes contemptible which is not perfect? Let us survey our state with an impartial eye, and be just to the various gifts of Heaven. How vain soever this life, considered in itself, may be, the comforts and hopes of religion are sufficient to give solidity to the enjoyments of the righteous. In the exercise of good affections, and the testimony of an approving conscience; in the sense of peace and reconciliation with God through the great Redeemer of mankind; in the firm confidence of being conducted through all the trials of life by infinite wisdom and goodness; and in the joyful prospect of arriving in the end at immortal felicity; they possess a happiness which, descending from a purer and more perfect religion than this world, partakes not of its vanity.

Besides the enjoyments peculiar to religion, there are other pleasures of our present state, which, though of an inferiour order, must not be overlooked in the estimate of human life. It is necessary to call attention to these, in order to check that repining and unthankful spirit to which
man

man is always too prone. Some degree of importance must be allowed to the comforts of health, to the innocent gratifications of sense, and to the entertainment afforded us by all the beautiful scenes of nature; some to the pursuits and amusements of social life; and more to the internal enjoyments of thought and reflection, and to the pleasures of affectionate intercourse with those whom we love. These comforts are often held in too low estimation, merely because they are ordinary and common; although that be the circumstance which ought, in reason, to enhance their value. They lie open, in some degree, to all; extend through every rank of life, and fill up agreeably many of those spaces in our present existence, which are not occupied with higher objects, or with serious cares.

We are in several respects unjust to Providence in the computation of our pleasures and our pains. We number the hours which are spent in distress or sorrow; but we forget those which have passed away, if not in high enjoyment, yet in the

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midst of those gentle satisfactions and placid emotions which make life glide smoothly along. We complain of the frequent disappointments which we suffer in our pursuits. But we recollect not, that it is in pursuit, more than in attainment, that our pleasure now consists. In the present state of human nature, man derives more enjoyment from the exertion of his active powers in the midst of toils and efforts, than he could receive from a still and uniform possession of the object which he strives to gain. The solace of the mind under all its labours, is hope ; and there are few situations which entirely exclude it. Forms of expected bliss are often gleaming upon us through a cloud, to revive and exhilarate the most distressed. If pains be scattered through all the conditions of life, so also are pleasures. Happiness, as far as life affords it, can be engrossed by no rank of men to the exclusion of the rest ; on the contrary, it is often found where, at first view, it would have been least expected. When the human condition appears most depressed, the feelings of men, through the
gracious

gracious appointment of Providence, adjust themselves wonderfully to their state, and enable them to extract satisfaction from sources that are totally unknown to others. Were the great body of men fairly to compute the hours which they pass in ease, and even with some degree of pleasure, they would be found far to exceed the number of those which are spent in absolute pain either of body or mind. But in order to make a still more accurate estimation of the degree of satisfaction which, in the midst of earthly vanity, man is permitted to enjoy, the three following observations claim our attention :

THE first is, that many of the evils which occasion our complaints of the world are wholly imaginary. They derive their existence from fancy and humour, and childish subjection to the opinion of others. The distress which they produce, I admit, is real ; but its reality arises not from the nature of things, but from that disorder of imagination which a small measure of reflection might rectify. In proof of this, we

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may observe that the persons who live most simply, and follow the dictates of plain unadulterated nature, are most exempted from this class of evils. It is among the higher ranks of mankind that they chiefly abound ; where fantastic refinements, sickly delicacy, and eager emulation, open a thousand sources of vexation peculiar to themselves. Life cannot but prove vain to them who affect a disrelish of every pleasure that is not both exquisite and new ; who measure enjoyment not by their own feelings, but by the standard of fashion ; who think themselves miserable if others do not admire their state. It is not from wants or sorrows that their complaints arise ; but, though it may appear a paradox, from too much freedom from sorrow and want ; from the languor of vacant life, and the irritation occasioned by those stagnating humours which ease and indulgence have bred within them. In their case, therefore, it is not the vanity of the world, but the vanity of their minds, which is to be accused. Fancy has raised up the spectres which haunt them. Fancy has
formed

formed the cloud which hangs over their life. Did they allow the light of reason to break forth, the spectres would vanish, and the cloud be dispelled.

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THE second observation on this head is, that, of those evils which may be called real, because they owe not their existence to fancy, nor can be removed by rectifying opinion, a great proportion is brought upon us by our own misconduct. Diseases, poverty, disappointment, and shame, are far from being, in every instance, the unavoidable doom of men. They are much more frequently the offspring of their own misguided choice. Intemperance engenders disease, sloth produces poverty, pride creates disappointments, and dishonesty exposes to shame. The ungoverned passions of men betray them into a thousand follies; their follies into crimes; and their crimes into misfortunes. Yet nothing is more common than for such as have been the authors of their own misery, to make loud complaints of the hard fate of man, and to take revenge upon the human condition by

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arraigning its supposed vanity. *The foolishness of man first perverteth his way, and then his heart fretteth against the Lord.*

I do not, however, maintain, that it is within our power to be altogether free of those self-procured evils. For perfection of any kind is beyond the reach of man. Where is the wisdom that never errs? where the just man that offendeth not? Nevertheless, much is here left to ourselves; and, imperfect as we are, the consequences of right or of wrong conduct make a wide difference in the happiness of men. Experience every day shows, that a sound, a well-governed, and virtuous mind contributes greatly to smooth the path of life; and that *wisdom excelleth folly as far as light excelleth darkness. The way of the wicked is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble. But the righteousness of the perfect shall direct his ways; and he that walketh uprightly, walketh surely.* The tendency of the one is towards a plain and safe region. The course of the other leads him amidst snares and precipices. The one occasionally may, the other unavoidably

voidably must, incur much trouble. Let us not then confound, under one general charge, those evils of the world which belong to the lot of humanity, and those which, through divine assistance, a wise and good man may, in a great measure, escape.

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THE third observation which I make respects those evils which are both real and unavoidable; from which neither wisdom nor goodness can procure our exemption. Under these this comfort remains, that if they cannot be prevented, there are means, however, by which they may be much alleviated. Religion is the great principle which acts under such circumstances, as the corrective of human vanity. It inspires fortitude, supports patience, and, by its prospects and promises, darts a cheering ray into the darkest shade of human life. If it cannot secure the virtuous from disappointment in their pursuits, it forms them to such a temper as renders their disappointments more light and easy than those of other men. If it does not banish dissatisfaction from their worldly pleasures, it confers

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confers spiritual pleasures in their stead. If it ensures them not the possession of what they love, it furnishes comfort under the loss. As far as it establishes a contented frame of mind, it supplies the want of all that worldly men covet to possess. Compare the behaviour of the sensual and corrupted with that of the upright and holy, when both are feeling the effects of human vanity, and the difference of their situation will be manifest. Among the former, you are likely to find a querulous and dejected ; among the latter, a composed and manly spirit. The lamentations of the one excite a mixture of pity and contempt ; while the dignity which the other maintains in distress, commands respect. The sufferings of the former settle into a peevish and fretful disposition ; those of the latter soften the temper, and improve the heart. These consequences extend so far as to give ground for asserting, that a good man enjoys more happiness in the course of a seemingly unprosperous life, than a bad man does in the midst of affluence and luxury. What a conspicuous proof of this is afforded by the

Apostle

Apostle Paul, who from the very depth of affliction could send forth such a triumphant voice as proclaims the complete victory which he had gained over the evils of life ! *Troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed. For, though our outward man perish, our inward man is renewed, day by day.* Such, though perhaps in an inferiour degree, will be the influence of a genuine religious principle upon all true Christians. It begins to perform that office to them here, which hereafter it will more completely discharge, of *wiping away the tears from their eyes.*

2 Cor. iv. 8,
9, 16.

SUCH, upon the whole, is the estimate which we are to form of human life. Much vanity will always belong to it ; though the degree of its vanity will depend, in a great measure, on our own character and conduct. To the vicious, it presents nothing but a continued scene of disappointment and dissatisfaction. To the good, it is a mixed state of things ; where many real
comforts

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comforts may be enjoyed ; where many resources under trouble may be obtained ; but where trouble, in one form or other, is to be expected as the lot of man. From this view of human life,

THE first practical conclusion which we are to draw is, That it highly concerns us not to be unreasonable in our expectations of worldly felicity. Let us always remember where we are ; from what causes the human state has become subject to depression ; and upon what accounts it must remain under its present law. Such is the infatuation of self-love, that though in the general doctrine of the vanity of the world all men agree, yet almost every one flatters himself that his own case is to be an exception from the common rule. He rests on expectations which he thinks cannot fail him ; and though the present be not altogether according to his wish, yet with the confidence of certain hope he anticipates futurity. Hence the anguish of disappointments fills the world ; and evils, which are of themselves sufficiently severe,
oppress

oppress with double force the unprepared and unsuspecting mind. Nothing therefore is of greater consequence to our peace, than to have always before our eyes such views of the world as shall prevent our expecting more from it than it is destined to afford. We destroy our joys by devouring them beforehand with too eager expectation. We ruin the happiness of life when we attempt to raise it too high. A tolerable and comfortable state is all that we can propose to ourselves on earth. Peace and contentment, not bliss nor transport, is the full portion of man. Perfect joy is reserved for heaven.

BUT while we repress too sanguine hopes formed upon human life, let us, in the second place, guard against the other extreme, of repining and discontent. Enough has been already said to show, that, notwithstanding the vanity of the world, a considerable degree of comfort is attainable in the present state. Let the recollection of this serve to reconcile us to our condition, and to check the arrogance of complaints
and

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and murmurs.—What art thou, O son of man! who having sprung but yesterday out of the dust, darest to lift up thy voice against thy Maker, and to arraign his providence, because all things are not ordered according to thy wish? What title hast thou to find fault with the order of the universe, whose lot is so much beyond what thy virtue or merit gave thee ground to claim? Is it nothing to thee to have been introduced into this magnificent world; to have been admitted as a spectator of the divine wisdom and works; and to have had access to all the comforts which Nature, with a bountiful hand, has poured forth around thee? Are all the hours forgotten which thou hast passed in ease, in complacency, or joy? Is it a small favour in thy eyes, that the hand of divine mercy has been stretched forth to aid thee, and, if thou reject not its proffered assistance, is ready to conduct thee into a happier state of existence? When thou comparest thy condition with thy desert, blush, and be ashamed of thy complaints. Be silent, be grateful, and adore. Receive with thankfulness

fulness the blessings which are allowed thee. Revere that government which at present refuses thee more. Rest in this conclusion, that though there be evils in the world, its Creator is wise and good, and has been bountiful to thee.

IN the third place, the view which we have taken of human life should naturally direct us to such pursuits as may have most influence for correcting its vanity. There are two great lines of conduct which offer themselves to our choice. The one leads towards the goods of the mind; the other towards those of fortune. The former, which is adopted only by the few, engages us chiefly in forming our principles, regulating our dispositions, improving all our inward powers. The latter, which in every age has been followed by the multitude, points at no other end but attaining the conveniences and pleasures of external life. It is obvious, that, in this last pursuit, the vanity of the world will encounter us at every step. For this is the region in which it reigns, and where it chiefly displays its power.

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power. At the same time, to lay the world totally out of view, is a vain attempt. The numberless ties by which we are connected with external things, put it out of our power to behold them with indifference. But though we cannot wrap ourselves up entirely in the care of the mind, yet the more we make its welfare our chief object, the nearer shall we approach to that happy independence on the world, which places us beyond the reach of suffering from its vanity.

That discipline, therefore, which corrects the eagerness of worldly passions, which fortifies the heart with virtuous principles, which enlightens the mind with useful knowledge, and furnishes to it matter of enjoyment from within itself, is of more consequence to real felicity, than all the provision which we can make of the goods of fortune. To this let us bend our chief attention. Let us *keep the heart with all diligence, seeing out of it are the issues of life*. Let us account our mind the most important province which is committed to our care; and if we cannot rule fortune,
study

study at least to rule ourselves. Let us propose for our object, not worldly success, which it depends not on us to obtain; but that upright and honourable discharge of our duty in every conjuncture, which, through the divine assistance, is always within our power. Let our happiness be sought where our proper praise is found; and that be accounted our only real evil, which is the evil of our nature; not that, which is either the appointment of Providence, or which arises from the evil of others.

BUT, in order to carry on with success this rational and manly plan of conduct, it is necessary, in the last place, that to moral, we join religious discipline. Under the present imperfection of our minds, and amidst the frequent shocks which we receive from human evils, much do we stand in need of every assistance for supporting our constancy. Of all assistance to which we can have recourse, none is so powerful as what may be derived from the principles of the Christian faith. He who

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builds on any other foundation, will find in the day of trial that he had built his house on the sand. Man is formed by his nature to look up to a superiour being, and to lean upon a strength that is greater than his own. All the considerations which we can offer for confirming his mind, presuppose this resource, and derive from it their principal efficacy.

Never then let us lose sight of those great objects which religion brings under our view, if we hope to stand firm and erect amidst the dangers and distresses of our present state. Let us cultivate all that connection with the great Father of Spirits which our condition admits ; by piety and prayer ; by dependence on his aid, and trust in his promises ; by a devout sense of his presence, and a continual endeavour to acquire his grace and favour. Let us, with humble faith and reverence, commit ourselves to the blessed Redeemer of the world ; encouraged by the discoveries which he has made to us of the divine mercy, and by the hopes which he has afforded us of being raised to a nobler and happier station

tion in the kingdom of God. So shall virtue, grounded upon piety, attain its full strength. Inspired with a religious spirit, and guided by rational principles, we shall be enabled to hold a steady course through this mixed region of pleasure and pain, of hopes and fears; until the period arrive when that cloud which the present vanity of the world throws over human affairs, shall entirely disappear, and eternal light be diffused over all the works and ways of God.

SERMON VIII.

ON DEATH.

PSALM xxiii. 4.

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of
the shadow of death, I will fear no evil;
for thou art with me; thy rod and thy
staff they comfort me.*

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THIS Psalm exhibits the pleasing picture of a pious man rejoicing in the goodness of Heaven. He looks around him on his state, and his heart overflows with gratitude. When he reviews the past part of his life, he contemplates God as his *shepherd, who hath made him lie down in green pastures, and led him beside the still waters.* When he considers the present, he beholds his divine benefactor *preparing a table for him in the presence of his enemies, and making*

ing his cup run over. When he looks forward to the future, he confides in the same goodness, as continuing to *follow him all the days of his life, and bringing him to dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.* Amidst these images of tranquillity and happiness, one object presents itself, which is sufficient to overcast the minds and to damp the joy of the greatest part of men; that is, the approach of death. But on the Psalmist it produced no such effect. With perfect composure and serenity, he looks forward to the time when he is to pass through *the valley of the shadow of death.* The prospect, instead of dejecting him, appears to heighten his triumph, by that security which the presence of his almighty Guardian afforded him. *I will fear no evil, for thou art with me;* and pursuing the allusion with which he had begun, exults in the hope that the shepherd who had hitherto conducted him, would support him with his *staff*, while he passed through that dark and perilous region, and with his rod, or pastoral crook, would guard him from every danger.

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Such is the happy distinction which good men enjoy, in a situation the most formidable to human nature. That threatening spectre which appals others, carries no terror to them. While worldly men are justly said *through fear of death to be all their life-time subject to bondage*, to the righteous only it belongs to look on death, and smile. Since then it is in the power of religion to confer upon us so high a privilege, let us adventure to contemplate steadily this last foe whom we must all encounter. Let us consider what death is in itself, and by what means good men are enabled to meet it with fortitude. Though the subject may be reckoned gloomy, it must be admitted to be interesting. The close of life is a solemn and important event, to which every wise man will have regard in the general tenour of his conduct. No one can act his part with propriety, who considers not how it is to terminate; and to exclude from our thoughts what we cannot prevent from actually taking place, is the refuge of none but the timorous and weak.

weak. We are more encouraged to enter on this meditation, by reflecting on the superiour advantages which, as Christians, we enjoy for overcoming the fear of death, beyond that holy man whose sentiment is now before us. Those great objects, which he beheld through the medium of types and figures, are clearly revealed to us. That dispensation of grace, which in his days began to open, is now completed. That life and immortality, which then only dawned on the world, have now shone forth with full light and splendour.

DEATH may be considered in three views: as the separation of the soul from the body; as the conclusion of the present life; as the entrance into a new state of existence. In the first view, it is regarded as painful and agonizing. In the second, it is melancholy and dejecting. In the third, it is awful and alarming. One of the first inquiries which occurs concerning it is, for what purposes it was clothed with all these terrors? Why, under the government of a gracious Being, the termination

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of life was loaded with so much sorrow and distress? We know that, in consequence of the fall, death was inflicted as a punishment upon the human race. But no unnecessary severities are ever exercised by God; and the wisdom and goodness of the divine plan will be much illustrated, by observing that all the formidable circumstances which attend death are, in the present situation of mankind, absolutely requisite to the proper government of the world. The terrors of death are, in fact, the great guardians of life. They excite in every individual that desire of self-preservation, which is Nature's first law. They reconcile him to bear the distresses of life with patience. They prompt him to undergo its useful and necessary labours with alacrity; and they restrain him from many of those evil courses by which his safety would be endangered. While they are in so many respects beneficial to the individual, they are, at the same time, the safeguard of society. If death were not dreaded and abhorred as it is by men, no public order could be preserved in the world. The sword of authority

rity were lifted up in vain. The sanctions of law would lose their effect. The scaffold and the executioner would be derided; and the violent left to trample unrestrained on the rights of the peaceful. If, notwithstanding the restraints which self-preservation imposes, society is so often disturbed by the crimes of the wicked, what a scene of confusion would it become, if capital punishments, which are the last resource of government, were of no influence to deter offenders!

For such important ends the conclusion of life has, by the appointment of Providence, been made an awful object. The valley of death has been planted with terrors to the apprehension of men. Here, as in many other instances, what seemed at first to arraign the goodness of the Deity, is upon inquiry found to confirm it. But though, for the most salutary purposes, it was requisite that the fear of death should be a powerful principle in human nature, yet, like our other propensities, it is apt, when left to itself, to run into excess. Over many it usurps such an ascendant as to
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debase their character, and to defeat the chief ends of living. To preserve it within such bounds that it shall not interrupt us in performing the proper offices and duties of life, is the distinction of the brave man above the coward ; and to surmount it in such a degree, that it shall not, even in near prospect, deject our spirit, or trouble our peace, is the great preference which virtue enjoys above guilt. It has been the study of the wise and reflecting, in every age, to attain this steadiness of mind. Philosophy pursued it as its chief object ; and professed that the great end of its discipline was, to enable its votaries to conquer the fear of death. Let us then, before we have recourse to the more powerful aid of Religion, hearken for a little to what Reason has suggested on this subject. Her assistance may, perhaps, be not entirely despicable ; and though the armour which she offers be not completely of proof, it may serve, however, to turn aside, or to blunt, some of the shafts which are aimed against us by the last foe.

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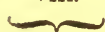
AFTER this manner she may be supposed to address mankind, in order to reconcile them to their fate.—Children of men! it is well known to you, that you are a mortal race. Death is the law of your nature, the tribute of your being, the debt which all are bound to pay. On these terms you received life, that you should be ready to give it up when Providence calls you to make room for others, who, in like manner, when their time is come, shall follow you. He who is unwilling to submit to death when Heaven decrees it, deserves not to have lived. You might as reasonably complain that you did not live before the time appointed for your coming into the world, as lament that you are not to live longer, when the period of your quitting it is arrived. What divine Providence hath made necessary, human prudence ought to comply with cheerfully. Submit at any rate you must; and is it not much better to follow of your own accord, than to be dragged reluctantly, and by force? What privilege have you to plead, or what reason to urge, why you should
possess

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possess an exemption from the common doom? All things around you are mortal and perishing. Cities, states, and empires, have their period set. The proudest monuments of human art moulder into dust. Even the works of nature wax old and decay. In the midst of this universal tendency to change, could you expect that to your frame alone a permanent duration should be given? All who have gone before you, have submitted to the stroke of death. All who are to come after you, shall undergo the same fate. The great and the good, the prince and the peasant, the renowned and the obscure, travel alike the road which leads to the grave. At the moment when you expire, thousands throughout the world, shall, together with you, be yielding up their breath. Can that be held a great calamity, which is common to you with every thing that lives on earth; which is an event as much according to the course of nature, as it is that leaves shall fall in autumn, or that fruit should drop from the tree when it is fully ripe?

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The pain of death cannot be very long, and is probably less severe than what you have at other times experienced. The pomp of death is more terrifying than death itself. It is to the weakness of imagination that it owes its chief power of dejecting your spirits; for when the force of the mind is roused, there is almost no passion in our nature but what has showed itself able to overcome the fear of death. Honour has defied death; love has despised it; shame has rushed upon it; revenge has disregarded it; grief a thousand times has wished for its approach. Is it not strange that reason and virtue cannot give you strength to surmount that fear, which, even in feeble minds, so many passions have conquered? What inconsistency is there in complaining so much of the evils of life, and being at the same time so afraid of what is to terminate them all? Who can tell whether his future life might not teem with disasters and miseries, as yet unknown, were it to be prolonged according to his wish? At any rate, is it desirable to draw life out to
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the last dregs, and to wait till old age pour upon you its whole store of diseases and sorrows? You lament that you are to die; but did you view your situation properly, you would have much greater cause to lament if you were chained to this life for two or three hundred years, without possibility of release. Expect therefore calmly that which is natural in itself, and which must be fit, because it is the appointment of Heaven. Perform your duty as a good subject of the Deity, during the time allotted you; and rejoice that a period is fixed for your dismissal from the present warfare. Remember that the slavish dread of death destroys all the comfort of that life which you seek to preserve. Better to undergo the stroke of death at once, than to live in perpetual misery from the fear of dying.

SUCH discourses as these are specious at least, and plausible. The arguments are not without strength, and ought to produce some effect on a considerate reflecting mind.

mind. But it is to be suspected that their effect will be chiefly felt when the mind is calm and at ease; rather when speculating upon death at a distance, than when beholding it at hand. When the critical moment arrives, which places the anxious trembling soul on the borders of an unknown world, reasonings drawn from necessity and propriety will be of small avail to quiet its alarms. In order to afford relief, you must give it hope; you must promise it protection; you must offer somewhat on which it can lay hold for support amidst the struggles of labouring nature. Hence the great importance of those discoveries which revelation has made, and of those principles with which it fortifies the heart. To the consideration of these let us next proceed, and observe their superiour efficacy for surmounting the fear of death. In order to judge of their importance, it will be proper to take a view of death in each of those lights in which it appears most formidable to mankind.

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IT may be considered, first, as the termination of our present existence; the final period of all its joys and hopes. The concluding scene of any course of action in which we have been engaged with pleasure, even the last sight of objects which we have been long accustomed to behold, seldom fails of striking the mind with painful regret. How many circumstances will concur to heighten that regret, when the time comes of our bidding an eternal adieu to the light of day; to every pursuit which had occupied our attention as citizens of the world; and to every friend and relation who had attached our hearts! How dejecting is the thought to the greatest part of men, that the sun shall rise, and the seasons shall return to others, but no more to them; and that, while their neighbours are engaged in the usual affairs of life, they shall be shut up in a dark lonesome mansion, forgotten and cut off from among men, as though they never had been! *I said, in the cutting off my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave. I am deprived of the residue of my years. I shall not see the Lord*

Isa. xxxviii.
10, 11.

Lord again in the land of the living. I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world.

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Let us now observe, that the dejection into which we are apt to sink at such a juncture, will bear proportion to the degree of our attachment to the objects which we leave, and to the importance of those resources which remain with us when they are gone. He who is taking farewell of a country through which he had travelled with satisfaction, and he who is driven from his native land, with which he had connected every idea of settlement and comfort, will have very different feelings at the time of departure. Such is the difference which, at the hour of death, takes place between the righteous and the ungodly. The latter knows nothing higher or better than the present state of existence. His interests, his pleasures, his expectations, all centered here. He lived solely for the enjoyments of this world. Dreadful, therefore, and insupportable must be that event which separates him from these for ever. Whereas the culture of religion had previously formed

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the mind of a Christian for a calm and easy transition from this life. It had instructed him in the proper estimate of sublunary happiness. It had set higher prospects before him. It had formed him to a more refined taste of enjoyment, than what the common round of worldly amusements could gratify. It gave him connections and alliances with spiritual objects, which are unknown to the men of the world. Hence, though he be attached to life by the natural feelings of humanity, he is raised above the weak and unmanly regret of parting with it. He knew that it was intended as preparatory only to a succeeding state. As soon as the season of preparation should be finished, he expected a removal; and when Providence gives the signal, he bids adieu to the world with composed resolution and undisturbed heart. What though death interrupt him in the middle of his designs, and break off the plans which he had formed, of being useful to his family and the world? All these he leaves with tranquillity in the hands of that Providence to which he has ever been accustomed to look

look up with resignation; which governed the world wisely and graciously before he existed; and which he knows will continue to govern it with equal wisdom and benignity when he shall be in it no more. The time of his departure was not left to his own choice; but he believes it to be the most proper, because it is the time chosen by Him who cannot err. *Honourable age is not that which standeth in length of time, nor that which is measured by number of years. But wisdom is the grey hair to man; and an unspotted life is old age.* When he beholds his friends and relations mourning around him, his heart may melt, but will not be overpowered; for it is relieved by the thought that he is bidding them only a temporary, not an eternal farewell. He commends them, in the mean time, to the blessing of that God whom he has served; and while he is parting from them, he hears a voice which soothes his spirit with those comforting words, *Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me.*

Wisdom of
Solomon,
iv. 8, 9.

Jer. xlix. 21.

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BUT death is more than the conclusion of human life. It is the gate which, at the same time that it closes on this world, opens into eternity. Under this view, it has often been the subject of terrour to the serious and reflecting. The transition they were about to make was awful. Before them lay a vast undiscovered region, from whose bourn no traveller ever returned to bring information of the reception which he found, or of the objects which he met with there. The first conception which suggests itself is, that the disembodied spirit is to appear before its Creator, who is then to act as its Judge. The strict inquisition which it must undergo, the impartial doom which it must hear pronounced, and the unalterable state to which it shall be assigned, are awful forms rising before the imagination. They are ideas which conscience forces upon all. Mankind can neither avoid considering themselves as accountable creatures, nor avoid viewing death as the season when their account is to be given. Such a sentiment is with most men the source of dread; with all men, of anxiety. To a certain degree,

gree, a good conscience will convey comfort. The reflection on a well-spent life makes a wide difference between the last moments of the righteous and the sinner. But whose conscience is so clear as to strike him with no remorse? Whose righteousness is so unblemished as to abide the scrutiny of the great searcher of hearts? Who dares rest his everlasting fate upon his perfect conformity to the rule of duty throughout the whole of his life?

We must not judge of the sentiments of men at the approach of death, by their ordinary train of thought in the days of health and ease. Their views of moral conduct are then, too generally, superficial; slight excuses satisfy their minds, and the avocations of life prevent their attention from dwelling long on disagreeable subjects. But when altogether withdrawn from the affairs of the world, they are left to their own reflections on past conduct; with their spirits enfeebled by disease, and their minds impressed with the terrors of an invisible region; the most resolute are apt to despond, and even the virtuous are

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in danger of sinking under the remembrance of their errors and frailties. The trembling mind casts every where around an anxious exploring eye after any power that can uphold, any mercy that will shield and save it. And accordingly we see how eagerly every device has been embraced, which superstition could invent in various countries, for quieting the alarms of the departing spirit.

Here appears the great importance of those discoveries which Christianity has made concerning the government of the universe. It displays the ensigns of grace and clemency. It reveals the Almighty, not as a creator only and a judge, but as a compassionate parent, *who knows our frame, who remembers we are dust, who pities us as a father pitieth his children; and with whom there is forgiveness*, that he may be loved as well as feared. These general views, however, of the divine administration, would not have been sufficient to give full relief, if they had not been confirmed by certain decisive facts to which the mind can appeal amidst all its doubts and fears. Two such

such facts the gospel holds forth to us, particularly adapted to the situation of human nature in its greatest extremity; the atonement and the intercession of Christ. There is no sentiment more natural to men than this, that guilt must be expiated by suffering. All government is founded on the principle, that public justice requires compensation for crimes; and all religions proceed upon the belief, that, in order to the pardon of the sinner, atonement must be made to the justice of Heaven. Hence the endless variety of sacrifices, victims, and expiations, which have filled the earth. The great sacrifice which our Redeemer offered for guilt, coincides with these natural sentiments of mankind in giving ease to the heart. It shows us the forfeit of guilt paid by a divine personage in our behalf; and allows us to look up to the Governour of the world, as merciful to the guilty in consistency with justice and order. But still some anxiety might remain concerning the extension of that mercy to our own case in particular. An invisible sovereign is an awful idea; almighty, unknown power, is

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always formidable, and would be ready to overwhelm the spirit of the feeble, were not an intercessor with that sovereign revealed. This intercessor is one who lived and acted in our own nature ; who not only knows, but who experienced our frailty ; who has all the feelings of a brother for human infirmity and distress ; who himself passed through that *valley of the shadow of death* which is now opening on us ; to whose powerful mediation with his Father, we have every encouragement to commit the charge of our departing spirit.—Such is the provision which Christianity has made for comforting the last hours of man. The atonement, and the intercession of Christ, are the refuge of the penitent sinner, and the consolation of the saint. By their means, the throne of the universe is encircled with mercy. The cloud which hung over the invisible world begins to be dispersed ; and hope brightens through the gloom.

BUT what completes the triumph of good men over death, is the prospect of eternal felicity. This was the great object
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after which all nations have sighed, as the only complete remedy both of the miseries of life and the fears of death. On this, the learned and the ignorant, the civilized and the savage tribes of mankind, bent their longing eyes; eagerly grasping at every argument, and fondly indulging every hope, that could promise them a propitious Deity, and a prolongation of existence in a happier state. But beyond wishes and feeble expectations, the light of nature could hardly reach. Even the most cultivated, philosophical mind was, at the hour of dissolution, left in painful suspense. Christianity has put an end to all hesitation and doubt on this important subject. It has drawn aside the veil through which reason essayed to penetrate; and has displayed to full view the future dwellings of the spirits of the just, the mansions of everlasting rest, *the city of the living God*. Not only has it informed us that a state of perfect felicity is prepared for the righteous, but it has added to this information a variety of circumstances which render that state sensible to our imagination, and encouraging

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John, xi. 25.

—xx. 17.

ing to our hopes. It represents it as fully secured by the gracious undertaking of the Saviour of the world. It describes it as *an inheritance*, to which he has given his followers a right and title. He is said to have taken possession of it in their name. He rose from the grave as *the first-fruits of them that sleep*; and under the character of their *fore-runner*, entered into the heavenly regions. *I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. I give unto my sheep eternal life. I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.*

Hence, to those who have lived a virtuous life, and who die in the faith of Christ, the whole aspect of death is changed. Death is to them no longer the tyrant who approaches with his iron rod, but the messenger who brings the tidings of life and liberty. The prospects which open to them cheer their minds. Even in the valley of death's shade, *green pastures* appear to rise. They view themselves as going forth, not to lie silent and solitary in the darkness of the

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the grave, not to wander forsaken in the wide deserts of the universe, not even to pass into a region where they are altogether strangers and unknown; but to enter on a land, new indeed to sight, but by faith and hope frequented long before; where they shall continue to be under the charge of him who hath hitherto been their guardian, be re-united to many of their ancient and beloved friends, and admitted to join the *innumerable multitude, gathered out of all nations, and tongues, and people, who stand before the throne of God.* They leave behind the dregs of their nature; and exchange this confined and gloomy apartment of the universe, for the glorious mansions of their Father's house. Blessed surely are the dying in this hope, and *blessed the dead in this fruition, resting from their labours, and followed by their works.* Good men are detained at present in the outer court of the temple: Death admits them into the holy place. As yet, they sojourn in the territories of pilgrimage and exile: Death brings them home to the native land of Spirits. In this world, they are divided
from

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Wisdom of
Solomon,
iii, 2, 3.
—v. 15.

from one another, and mingled with the worthless and vile: Death unites in one assembly all the pure and the just. *In the sight of the universe they seemed to die, and their departure was taken for utter destruction. But they are in peace. Their reward also is with the Lord, and the care of them with the Most High.—O Death! where is now thy sting? O Grave! where is thy victory? Where are the terrors with which thou hast so long affrighted the nations? Where are thy dreary and desolate domains, the haunts of spectres and shades, the abhorred dwellings of darkness and corruption? At the touch of the divine rod, thy visionary horrors have fled. The spell is broken. The dawn of the celestial morning has dispelled thy dismal gloom; and, instead of the *habitations of dragons*, appears the paradise of God.*

BUT supposing both the regret of quitting life, and the dread of entering into a future state, to be overcome, there is still one circumstance which renders death formidable to many; that is, the shock which
nature

nature is apprehending to sustain at the separation of the soul from the body. Formidable, I admit, this may justly render it to them whose languishing spirits have no inward fund whence they can then draw relief. Firmness and strength of mind are peculiarly requisite for the support of nature in its last extremity; and that strength is supplied by religion. The testimony of a good conscience, and the remembrance of a virtuous life, a well-grounded trust in the divine acceptance, and a firm hope of future felicity, are principles sufficient to give composure and fortitude to the heart, even in the midst of agony. In what a high degree they can suspend or alleviate the feelings of pain, has been fully demonstrated, by the magnanimous behaviour of such as have suffered death in the cause of conscience and religion. How often has the world beheld them advancing to meet that supposed king of terrors, not with calmness only, but with joy; raised by divine prospects and hopes, into an entire neglect and contempt of bodily suffering?

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It is not without reason that a peculiar assistance from Heaven is looked for by good men at the hour of death. As they are taught to believe, that in all the emergencies of their life divine goodness has watched over them, they have ground to conclude, that at the last it will not forsake them; but that, at the season when its aid is most needed, it shall be most liberally communicated. Accordingly, a persuasion so congruous to the benignity and compassion of the Father of mercies, has been the comfort of pious men in every age. *My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart. In the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. When the rod and staff of this Shepherd of Israel are held forth to his expiring servants, declining nature needs no other support. The secret influence of his reviving Spirit is sufficient for their consolation and strength, while the painful struggle with mortality lasts; till at length, when the moment arrives that the silver cord must be loosed, and the golden bowl be broken,*

broken, their Almighty Protector carries off the immortal spirit unhurt by the fall of its earthly tabernacle, and places it in a better mansion.—How respectable and happy is such a conclusion of human life, when one in this manner quits the stage of time, honoured and supported with the presence of his Creator, and enjoying, till the last moment of reflection, the pleasing thought, that he has not lived in vain! I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that day.

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2 Tim. iv.
7, 8.

AFTER the view which we have taken of the advantages possessed by good men for overcoming the fears of death, the first sentiment which should arise in our minds, is gratitude to Heaven for the hopes which we enjoy by means of the Christian religion. How depressed and calamitous was the human condition, as long as the terrour
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of death hung, like a dark cloud, over the inhabitants of the earth; when, after all the toils of life, the melancholy silence of the grave appeared finally to close the scene of existence; or, if a future state opened behind it, that state teemed with all those forms of horror which conscious guilt could suggest to a terrified imagination! The happiest change which ever took place in the circumstances of the human race, is that produced by the discoveries with which we are blessed, concerning the government of the universe, the redemption of the world, and the future destination of man. How much dignity is thereby added to the human character and state! What light and cheerfulness is introduced into our abode! What eternal praise is due to Him, who, *according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again into a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven!*

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THE next effect which the subject we have considered should produce, is an earnest desire to acquire those advantages which good men enjoy at their death. The road which leads to them is plain and obvious. A peaceful and happy death is, by the appointment of Heaven, connected with a holy and virtuous life. Let us renounce criminal pursuits and pleasures; let us fear God, and keep his commandments; let us *hold faith and a good conscience*, if we hope for comfort at our last hour. To prepare for this last hour, every wise man should consider as his most important concern. Death may justly be held the test of life. Let a man have supported his character with esteem and applause, as long as he acted on the busy stage of the world, if at the end he sinks into dejection and terrour, all his former honour is effaced; he departs under the imputation of either a guilty conscience or a pusillanimous mind. In the other parts of human conduct, disguise and subtlety may impose on the world; but seldom can artifice be supported in the hour of death

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Psalm
xxxvii. 37.

The mask most commonly falls off, and the genuine character appears. When we behold the scene of life closed with proper composure and dignity, we naturally infer integrity and fortitude. We are led to believe that divine assistance supports the soul, and we presage its transition into a happier mansion. *Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace.*

THE last instruction, which our subject points out, respects the manner in which a wise and good man ought to stand affected towards life and death. He ought not to be servilely attached to the one. He has no reason abjectly to dread the other. Life is the gift of God, which he may justly cherish and hold dear. Nay, he is bound by all fair means to guard and preserve it, that he may continue to be useful in that post of duty where Providence has placed him. But there are higher principles to which the love of life should remain subordinate. Wherever religion, virtue, or true honour, call him forth to danger, life ought

ought to be hazarded without fear. 'There is a generous contempt of death, which should distinguish those who live and walk by the faith of immortality. This is the source of courage in a Christian. His behaviour ought to show the elevation of his soul above the present world; ought to discover the liberty which he possesses, of following the native sentiments of his mind, without any of those restraints and fetters which the fear of death imposes on vicious men.

At the same time, this rational contempt of death must carefully be distinguished from that inconsiderate and thoughtless indifference, with which some have affected to treat it. This is what cannot be justified on any principle of reason. Human life is no trifle, which men may play away at their pleasure. Death, in every view, is an important event. It is the most solemn crisis of the human existence. A good man has reason to meet it with a calm and firm mind. But no man is entitled to treat it with ostentatious levity. It

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calls for manly seriousness of thought. It requires all the recollection of which we are capable; that with the proper disposition of dependent beings, when the dust is about to *return to its dust*, we may deliver up *the spirit to Him who gave it*.

SERMON IX.

On the HAPPINESS of a FUTURE STATE.

[Preached at the Celebration of the Sacrament of the
Lord's Supper.]

REVELATIONS, vii. 9.

After this I beheld, and, lo! a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.

IN this mysterious book of Scripture many revolutions are foretold, which were to take place in the church of God. They are not indeed so foretold as to afford clear and precise information concerning the time of their coming to pass. It would have been, on many accounts, improper to

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have lifted up too far that awful veil which covers futurity. The intention of the Spirit of God was not to gratify the curiosity of the learned, by disclosing to them the fate of monarchies and nations, but to satisfy the serious concerning the general plan, and final issue, of the divine government. Amidst those distresses which befel Christians during the first ages, the discoveries made in this book were peculiarly seasonable; as they showed that there was an Almighty Guardian, who watched with particular attention over the interests of the church which he had formed; who foresaw all the commotions which were to happen among the kingdoms of the earth, and would so over-rule them as to promote in the end the cause of truth. This is the chief scope of those mystic visions with which the Apostle John was favoured; of seals opened in heaven; of trumpets sounding; and vials poured forth. The kingdom of darkness was to maintain for a while a violent struggle against the kingdom of light. But at the conclusion, a voice was to be heard, *as the voice of many waters*
and

and of mighty thunderings, saying, Allelujah, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever. Such is the prospect with which the Divine Spirit at intervals enlightens, and with which he finally terminates, the many dark and direful scenes that are exhibited in this book. In closing the canon of Scripture, he, with great propriety, leaves upon our mind deep impressions of the triumphs of righteousness, and of the blessedness of the redeemed. *After this I beheld, and, lo! a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.*

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Rev. xix. 6.
—xi. 15.

These words present a beautiful description of the happiness of saints in heaven; a subject on which it is, at all times, both comfortable and improving to meditate. On this day in particular, when we are to commemorate the dying love of our Saviour, we cannot be better employed than

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in contemplating what his love hath purchased; in order both to awaken our gratitude, and to confirm our attachment to him. The sacrament of the Supper is the oath of our fidelity. Let us dispose ourselves for celebrating it, by taking a view of the rewards which await the faithful. I shall, for this end, in several observations from the words of the Text, taken in connection with the context, endeavour to illustrate, in some imperfect degree, the prospect which is here afforded us of a state of future felicity; and then shall make practical improvement of the subject.

I. WHAT the words of the Text most obviously suggest is, that heaven is to be considered as a state of blessed society. *A multitude*, a numerous assembly, are here represented as sharing together the same felicity and honour. Without society, it is impossible for man to be happy. Place him in a region where he was surrounded with every pleasure; yet there, if he found himself a solitary individual, he would pine and languish. They are not merely our
wants,

wants, and our mutual dependence, but our native instincts also, which impel us to associate together. The intercourse which we here maintain with our fellows, is a source of our chief enjoyments. But, alas! how much are these allayed by a variety of disagreeable circumstances that enter into all our connexions! Sometimes we suffer from the distresses of those whom we love; and sometimes from their vices or frailties. Where friendship is cordial, it is exposed to the wounds of painful sympathy, and to the anguish of violent separation. Where it is so cool as not to occasion sympathetic pains, it is never productive of much pleasure. The ordinary commerce of the world consists in a circulation of frivolous intercourse, in which the heart has no concern. It is generally insipid, and often soured by the slightest difference in humour, or opposition of interest. We fly to company, in order to be relieved from wearisome correspondence with ourselves; and the vexations which we meet with in society, drive us back again into solitude. Even among the virtuous, dissensions arise; and disagreement

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greement in opinion too often produces alienation of heart. We form few connexions where somewhat does not occur to disappoint our hopes. The beginnings are often pleasing. We flatter ourselves with having found those who will never give us any disgust. But weaknesses are too soon discovered. Suspicions arise; and love waxes cold. We are jealous of one another, and accustomed to live in disguise. A studied civility assumes the name, without the pleasure, of friendship; and secret animosity and envy are often concealed under the caresses of dissembled affection.

Hence the pleasure of earthly society, like all our other pleasures, is extremely imperfect; and can give us a very faint conception of the joy that must arise from the society of perfect spirits in a happier world. Here, it is with difficulty that we can select from the corrupted crowd a few with whom we wish to associate in strict union. There, are assembled all the wise, the holy, and the just, who ever existed in the universe of God; without any distress
to

to trouble their mutual bliss, or any source of disagreement to interrupt their perpetual harmony. Artifice and concealment are unknown there. There, no competitors struggle, no factions contend; no rivals supplant each other. The voice of discord never rises, the whisper of suspicion never circulates, among those innocent and benevolent spirits. Each, happy in himself, participates in the happiness of all the rest; and, by reciprocal communications of love and friendship, at once receives from and adds to the sum of general felicity. Renew the memory of the most affectionate friends with whom you were blest in any period of your life. Divest them of all those infirmities which adhere to the human character. Recal the most pleasing and tender moments which you ever enjoyed in their society; and the remembrance of those sensations may assist you in conceiving that felicity which is possessed by the saints above. The happiness of *brethren dwelling together in unity* is, with great justice and beauty, compared by the Psalmist to such things as are most refreshing

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Psalm

cxxxiii. 2.

freshing to the heart of man; to the fragrancy of the richest odours, and to the reviving influence of soft ethereal dews. *It is like the precious ointment poured on the head of Aaron; and like the dew of Hermon, even the dew that descendeth on the mountains of Zion, where the Lord commandeth the blessing, even life for evermore.*

Besides the felicity which springs from perfect love, there are two circumstances which particularly enhance the blessedness of that *multitude who stand before the throne*; these are, access to the most exalted society, and renewal of the most tender connexions. The former is pointed out in the Scripture by *joining the innumerable company of angels, and the general assembly and church of the first-born; by sitting down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven*; a promise which opens the sublimest prospects to the human mind. It allows good men to entertain the hope, that separated from all the dregs of the human mass, from that mixed and polluted crowd in the midst of which they now dwell, they shall be permitted to
mingle

Heb. xii.

22, 23.

Matth. viii.

11.

minge with prophets, patriarchs, and apostles, with legislators and heroes, with all those great and illustrious spirits, who have shone in former ages as the servants of God, or the benefactors of men; whose deeds we are accustomed to celebrate; whose steps we now follow at a distance; and whose names we pronounce with veneration.

United to this high assembly, the blessed at the same time renew those ancient connexions with virtuous friends which had been dissolved by death. The prospect of this awakens in the heart the most pleasing and tender sentiment which perhaps can fill it in this mortal state. For, of all the sorrows which we are here doomed to endure, none is so bitter as that occasioned by the fatal stroke which separates us, in appearance, for ever, from those to whom either nature or friendship had intimately joined our hearts. Memory, from time to time, renews the anguish; opens the wound which seemed once to have been closed; and, by recalling joys that are past and gone, touches every spring of painful sensibility.



sensibility. In these agonizing moments, how relieving the thought, that the separation is only temporary, not eternal; that there is a time to come, of re-union with those with whom our happiest days were spent; whose joys and sorrows once were ours; and from whom, after we shall have landed on the peaceful shore where they dwell, no revolutions of nature shall ever be able to part us more!—Such is the society of the blessed above. Of such are the multitude composed who *stand before the throne*. Let us now observe,

II. THAT this is not only a blessed but a numerous society. It is called *a multitude, a great multitude, a great multitude which no man could number*. These expressions convey the most enlarged views of the kingdom of glory. Dismay not yourselves with the apprehension of heaven being a confined and almost inaccessible region, into which it is barely possible for a small handful to gain admission, after making their escape from the general wreck of the human race. *In my Father's house,*

house, said our Saviour, *there are many mansions*. That *city of the living God*, towards which you profess to bend your course, is prepared for the reception of citizens innumerable. It already abounds with inhabitants, and more and more shall be added to it, until the end of time. Whatever difficulties there are in the way which leads to it, they have been often surmounted. The path, though narrow, is neither impassable nor untrodden. Though the gate stands not so wide as that which opens into hell, yet through the narrow gate multitudes have entered, and been crowned.

It is much to be lamented, that, among all denominations of Christians, the uncharitable spirit has prevailed, of unwarrantably circumscribing the terms of divine grace within a narrow circle of their own drawing. The one half of the Christian world has often doomed the other, without mercy, to eternal perdition. Without the pale of that church to which each sect belongs, they seem to hold it impossible for salvation to be attained. But is this the
genuine

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genuine spirit of the Gospel? Can a Christian believe the effects of the sufferings of Christ to be no greater than these? For this did the Son of God descend from the highest heavens, and pour out his soul unto the death, that only a few, who adopt the same modes of expression, and join in the same forms of worship with us, might be brought to the kingdom of heaven? Is this all *the deliverance he has wrought upon the earth? He was with child; he was in pain; and shall he not see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied?* Surely, the Scripture has given us full ground to conclude, that the trophies of our Redeemer's grace shall correspond to the greatness of his power. *The Captain of our salvation shall bring many sons with himself to glory. The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see his seed; He shall justify many. Men shall be blessed in him, and all nations shall call him blessed.* For our farther encouragement, let us observe,

III. THAT the heavenly society is represented in the Text, as gathered out of all the

the varieties of the human race. This is intimated by the remarkable expressions, *of a multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues*; as if designed on purpose to correct our narrow notions of the extent and power of divine grace. They whom distant seas and regions now divide, whose languages and manners are at present strange to one another, shall then mingle in the same assembly. No situation is so remote, and no station so unfavourable, as to preclude access to the heavenly felicity. A road is opened by the Divine Spirit to those blissful habitations, from all corners of the earth, and from all conditions of human life; from the peopled city, and from the solitary desert; from the cottages of the poor, and from the palaces of kings; from the dwellings of ignorance and simplicity, and from the regions of science and improvement. *They shall come*, says our blessed Lord himself, *from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God.*

Luke,
xiii. 29.

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Such discoveries serve both to enlarge our conceptions of the extent of divine goodness, and to remove those fears which are ready to arise from particular situations in life. Were you permitted to draw aside the veil, and to view that diversified assembly of the blessed who surround the throne, you would behold among them numbers who have overcome the same difficulties which encounter you, and which you dread as insuperable. You would behold there the uninstructed, with whom an upright intention supplied the place of knowledge; the feeble, whom divine grace had strengthened; and the misled, whom it had brought back into the right path. You would behold the young who had surmounted the allurements of youthful pleasure, and the old who had borne the distress of age with undecayed constancy; many whom want could not tempt to dishonesty; many whom riches did not seduce into pride or impiety; many who, in the most difficult and ensnaring circumstances, in the midst of camps and armies, and corrupted courts, had preserved unsullied

lied integrity. In a word, *from all kindreds and people*; that is, from all ranks of life, and all tribes of men, even from among *publicans and sinners*, you would behold those whom divine assistance had conducted to future glory.—And is not the same assistance, in its full extent, offered also to us? Encompassed, while we run the Christian race, with this *cloud of witnesses* who have finished their course with success; animated, while we *fight the good fight*, with the shouts of those who have overcome and are crowned, shall despair enervate or deject our minds? From the happy multitude above, there issues a voice which ought to sound perpetually in the ear of faith. *Be ye faithful unto the death, and ye shall receive the crown of life: Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might: Be followers of us who, through faith and patience, are now inheriting the promises.* Consider,

IV. THE description given in the Text of the happiness and glory of the heavenly society. They were beheld by the Apostle

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standing before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands. All that these *palms and white robes import*, it is not given us now to understand. We know that among all nations they have been used as ensigns of joy and victory; and are undoubtedly employed here to represent that distinguished felicity and honour to which human nature shall be then advanced. But we must be endowed with the faculties of the blessed, in order to comprehend their employments and pleasures; and therefore on this part of the subject I shall not attempt to enlarge. The silence of humble and respectful hope better becomes us, than the indulgence of those excursions of fancy, which degrade the subject they endeavour to exalt.

One circumstance only cannot fail to attract particular attention; That the blessed are here described as *standing before the throne, and before the Lamb*; that is, enjoying the immediate presence of the great Creator, and of the merciful Redeemer of the world. The unhappy distance at which

we

we are now removed from God, is the source of all our woes. Those territories which we inhabit, are not His abode. They are regions of exile. They are the dwellings of a fallen race ; and are condemned to be invested with clouds and darkness. Here, God standeth afar off. In vain we often pursue his presence through his works, his ways, and his religious institutions. He is said to be *a God that hideth himself. He dwelleth, as to us, in the secret place of thunder. He holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth a thick cloud upon it.* The manifestation of his presence shall be the signal for the renovation of all things. When that *Sun of righteousness* breaks forth from the cloud which now conceals him, sorrow and sin, and every evil thing, shall fly away before the brightness of his face. For neither guilt nor misery can remain where God dwells. As the rising of the sun transforms at once the face of nature, and converts the whole extent of space, over which his beams are spread, into a region of light ; so shall the divine presence, as soon as it is revealed, diffuse

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universal bliss over all who behold it. It imports *fulness of joy, and pleasure for evermore*. The inspired writer of this book thus describes its effects: *There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor pain: for the former things are passed away. He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more. But the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water. God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.* But, descending from this too sublime theme, let us,

V. TURN our attention to a circumstance in the state of future happiness, more commensurate to our present conceptions, which is suggested by the commentary upon the words of the Text given in the sequel of the chapter. *And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said unto me, These are they which come out of great tribulation.* This explanatory

Rev. vii.
13, 14.

natory circumstance may relate particularly to the case of those primitive sufferers who endured severe persecution in the cause of the gospel. But, in general, it presents this natural and beautiful view of the future felicity of good men, that it is their rest from the troubles and toils of life. For, to all, even to the happiest, human life is tribulation and conflict. No man is thoroughly at ease in his condition. Pursuits succeeding to pursuits keep us in constant agitation; while frequent returns of disappointment break our plans, and oppress our spirits.—Fatigued by such a variety of toils, mankind have ever looked forward to rest as their favourite object. Throughout all their ranks, from the highest to the lowest, they are in perpetual chace of it; and it perpetually flies before them. It is an object which here they are doomed always to seek, and never to enjoy.

The nature and laws of our present state admit not the gratification of this favourite wish. For, besides the necessity of trouble, in order to fulfil the purposes of discipline and improvement, our very happiness, such

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as it is in this world, requires a circulation of labours. Our enjoyment consists in pursuit, not in attainment. Attainment is with us, for most part, the grave of pleasure. Had we no object to excite fresh activity, and to impel us to new toils, human life would quickly stagnate in melancholy indolence. At the same time the current of all our wishes tends to repose. Imaginary forms float incessantly before our view, of the happiness which is to be enjoyed in rest: And from this conflict between our wishes on the one hand, and our actual situation on the other, arise much of the disquiet, and much of the infelicity, of human life. It is only in heaven that the tranquil repose, which on earth is no more than a pleasing phantom, shall be fully realized. There, *remaineth* at last *a rest for the people of God*; rest from the disturbance of passion, the vanity of pursuit, and the vexation of disappointment; rest from all the sins and the sorrows of this miserable world; rest, which shall not be merely an indolent cessation from labour, but a full and satisfying enjoyment. Good
men

men shall rest from their labours, and their works shall follow them. 'They have come out of great tribulation. 'They have fulfilled, with honour, their appointed course of trial. They have sat down in the seat of the Conqueror; and of past labours nothing remains but the pleasing review, and the happy fruits. There is still to be considered,

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VI. ONE very material circumstance, descriptive both of the character, and of the happiness, of those who enjoy the heavenly bliss. Not only have *they come out of great tribulation*, but, as the Spirit of God adds in explaining the Text, *they have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*. Two things are here suggested; the sanctity of the blessed, and the means by which it is attained.

Revelations,
vii. 14.

First, Their sanctity or purity is emblematically described, by their being clothed in robes which are washed and made white. In order to qualify human nature for the enjoyment of such happiness as I have endeavoured to describe, it must undergo a change

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change so great, as to receive in Scripture the appellation of *a new birth*; a change to which all the institutions of religion, and all the operations of grace contribute in this life, but which is not completed till the next. In this sanctity, or regeneration, consist not only the necessary preparations for future felicity, but which is not so commonly attended to, consists an essential part of that felicity itself. For whence arises the misery of this present world? It is not owing to our cloudy atmosphere, our changing seasons, and inclement skies. It is not owing to the debility of our bodies, or to the unequal distribution of the goods of fortune. Amidst all disadvantages of this kind, a pure, a stedfast, and enlightened mind, possessed of exalted virtue, could enjoy itself in peace, and smile at the impotent assaults of fortune and the elements. It is within ourselves that misery has fixed its seat. Our disordered hearts, our guilty passions, our violent prejudices, and misplaced desires, are the instruments of the torment which we endure. These sharpen the darts which adversity would otherwise point in
vain

vain against us. These are the *vials of wrath* which pour forth plagues on the inhabitants of the earth; and make the dwellings of nations become the abodes of woe. Thence discontent and remorse gnaw the hearts of individuals. Thence society is torn by open violence, or undermined by secret treachery; and man is transformed into a savage to man.

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But suppose sin to be banished from the world; suppose perfect purity and charity to descend from heaven, and to animate every human breast; and you would behold the present habitation of men changed into the paradise of God. The undisturbed enjoyment of a holy mind, and of a blissful union with one another, would scarcely allow us to feel those external evils of which we now so loudly complain. All nature would assume a different appearance around us. That golden age, which was so long the subject of the philosopher's dream, and of the poet's song, would in fact take place. According to the beautiful language of ancient prophecy, *springs would then rise in the desert, and rivers be*
opened

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opened in the thirsty land. The wilderness and the solitary place would be glad. The wolf would dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid. Judgment would dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. The desert would rejoice, and blossom as the rose.—

If such, even in this world, would be the effects of innocence and virtue completely restored, how much greater must they be in that *new earth*, and those *new heavens*, where rectitude of nature shall be combined with every circumstance of external felicity? It is the present imperfect state of human virtue, that hinders us from conceiving fully the influence of righteousness upon happiness. The *robes* in which the best men are now clothed, to use the language of the Text, are sullied with so many stains, as to convey no adequate idea of the original beauty which belongs to the garb of righteousness. But when these stains shall be washed away, when these robes shall be made perfectly white and pure, a lustre will flow from them, of which we can, as yet, form no conception.

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But how are the robes of the blessed thus washed? Whence is derived that spotless purity in which they are arrayed? The Spirit of God hath answered us, *from the blood of the Lamb*; leading our thoughts to that high dispensation of mercy, to which the saints above owe their establishment, first in grace, and then in glory. From that blood which was *shed for the remission of sins*, flow both the atonement of human guilt, and the regeneration of human nature. Human nature had fallen too low to be capable of retrieving itself. It could not regain its primitive innocence, and still less was capable of raising itself so high in the scale of existence as to mingle with angels. We had neither sufficient knowledge to discover, nor virtue to merit, nor ability to qualify ourselves for enjoying, celestial glory. Heaven must have been either covered from our view by perpetual darkness, or only beheld from afar as an inaccessible region, if Christ had not interposed to *open for us a new and living way within the veil*. The obligations which his generous undertaking has conferred upon the human

human race, will tend highly to increase the felicity of the blessed. The sense of being distinguished by so illustrious a benefactor, and the corresponding returns of gratitude and love to him, form some of the most pleasing of those emotions which shall continue to delight them through all eternity.

FROM those views of a state of future happiness which the Text has suggested, various instructions relating to life and practice naturally arise. We are taught to rectify our notions of felicity; to look for it, not in what is external, but in what relates to the mind and heart; in good dispositions and a purified soul; in unity and friendship with one another; and in the divine presence and favour. If such things form the principal articles of future bliss, they cannot but be essential to our happiness in the more early periods of existence; and he who seeks his chief enjoyment from an opposite quarter, errs widely from the path which conducts to felicity.

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We are farther taught whence to derive constancy and perseverance, amidst the present discouragements of a virtuous life. In this world, we often behold good men depressed, and the wicked prospering around us. Our best deeds meet with unjust returns from an ungrateful world. Sincerity is over-reached by craft, and innocence falls a victim to power. But let us not on such occasions say within ourselves, *that in vain we have cleansed our hearts, and washed our hands in innocency.* Let us rest on the assurance, that these disorders extend not far in the kingdom of God. They affect only the first stage of existence. They relate to discipline and trial, which will soon be finished. In that permanent state which is about to open, a new and better order of things shall arise. When dejected with the evils of life, let us look up to that happy *multitude who have come out of great tribulation, and now stand before the throne.* Until the day arrive which shall join us to that blessed assembly, let us show ourselves worthy of the hope that is before us, by supporting, with
a con-

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a constant mind, the trials of our fidelity.
Be patient; stablish your hearts. The coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

From the prospects which the Text has afforded, we may likewise learn what the spirit is which should regulate our life. Sanctity of conduct, dignity of character, elevation of affections, become those who expect to mingle with angels, and *spirits of just men made perfect*. I mean not that such prospects should carry away our whole attention from the present world, where undoubtedly lies the chief scene of human action, of human duty. But while we act as inhabitants of the earth, we ought at the same time so to remember our connection with a better world, as not to debase ourselves with what is mean, not to defile ourselves with what is impure, not to entangle ourselves among what is ensnaring, in the present state. Let neither its advantages elate, nor its disappointments deject us; but with an equal spirit, with a mind full of immortality, let us pass through all the changes of this mortal life.

Finally,

Finally, Let the discoveries of future happiness inspire us with suitable gratitude to God and Christ; to the eternal Father, who originally decreed such rewards for the righteous; and to the Son, who acts in the high character of the Dispenser of the divine mercies, and the great Restorer of the fallen race of men. Particularly when approaching to God in solemn acts of devotion, such as we are at this day to perform, let gratitude be alive and ardent in our heart. The commemoration of our Saviour's death, is in a high degree suited to awaken every emotion of tenderness and love. It brings before us, under one view, all the obligations which we lie under to this great benefactor of mankind. When just ready to suffer for our sake, he instituted this holy sacrament, and said, *Do this in remembrance of me.*—Whom, O blessed Jesus! shall we ever remember, if we are capable of forgetting Thee? Thee, to whom we owe the forgiveness of sin, and the restoration of divine favour; our victory over death, and our hope of life eternal! Thou hast enlarged

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our views beyond these territories of disorders and darkness. 'Thou hast discovered to us the *city of the living God*. 'Thou settest open the gates of that *new Jerusalem*; and leadest us into the *path of life*. 'Thou from age to age gatherest *out of every nation, and kindred, and people, that multitude which stand before the throne*. 'Thou bringest them *out of great tribulation*. Thine are the *white robes* with which they are invested; thine, *the palms* which they bear; and by 'Thee they are placed under the light of the divine countenance for ever.

SERMON X.

ON CANDOUR.

1 CORINTH. xiii. 5.

Charity—thinketh no evil.

RELIGION and Government are the two great foundations of order and comfort among mankind. Government restrains the outrages and crimes which would be subversive of society, secures the property, and defends the lives, of its subjects. But the defect of government is, that human laws can extend no farther than to the actions of men. Though they protect us from external violence, they leave us open on different sides to be wounded. By the vices which prevail in society, our tranquillity may be disturbed, and our lives in various ways embittered, while government

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can give us no redress. Religion supplies the insufficiency of law, by striking at the root of those disorders which occasion so much misery in the world. Its professed scope is to regulate, not actions alone, but the temper and inclinations. By this means it ascends to the sources of conduct; and very ineffectual would the wisest system of legislation prove for the happiness of mankind, if it did not derive aid from religion, in softening the dispositions of men, and checking many of those evil passions to which the influence of law cannot possibly reach.

We are led to this reflection by the description given in the context of charity, that great principle in the Christian system. The Apostle places it in a variety of lights, and under each of them explains its operation by its internal effects; not by the actions to which it gives rise, but by the dispositions which it produces in the heart. He justly supposes, that, if the temper be duly regulated, propriety of action will follow, and good order take place in external behaviour. Of those characters of charity
I have



I have chosen one for the subject of this Discourse, which leads to the consideration of a virtue highly important to us, both as Christians and as members of society. I shall endeavour, first, to explain the temper here pointed out, by showing what this description of charity imports, that *it thinketh no evil*; and then to recommend such a disposition, and to display the bad effects of an opposite turn of mind.

I. LET us consider what this description of charity imports. You will easily perceive that the expression in the Text is not to be understood in a sense altogether unlimited; as if there were no occasion on which we are to think unfavourably of others. To view all the actions of men with the same degree of complacency, would be contrary both to common understanding, and to many express precepts of religion. In a world where so much depravity abounds, were we to think and speak equally well of all, we must either be insensible of the distinction between right and wrong, or be indifferent to that distinction when

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we perceived it. Religion renders it our duty to *abhor that which is evil*; and, on many occasions, to express our indignation openly against it. But the Apostle, with great propriety, describes the temper which he is recommending, in such strong and general terms, as might guard us against that extreme, to which we are naturally most prone, of rash and unjust suspicion. The virtue which he means to inculcate, is that which is known by the name of Candour; a virtue, which, as soon as it is mentioned; every one will acknowledge to be essential to the character of a worthy man; a virtue which we seldom fail of ascribing to any person whom we seek to recommend to the esteem of others; but which, I am afraid, when we examine our own conduct in a religious view, is seldom the subject of inquiry.

It is necessary to observe, that true Candour is altogether different from that guarded, inoffensive language, and that studied openness of behaviour, which we so frequently meet with among men of the world. Smiling, very often, is the aspect, and
smooth

smooth are the words, of those who inwardly are the most ready to think evil of others. That Candour which is a Christian virtue, consists not in fairness of speech, but in fairness of heart. It may want the blandishment of external courtesy, but supplies its place with humane and generous liberality of sentiment. Its manners are unaffected, and its professions cordial. Exempt, on one hand, from the dark jealousy of a suspicious mind; it is no less removed, on the other, from that easy credulity which is imposed on by every specious pretence. It is perfectly consistent with extensive knowledge of the world, and with due attention to our own safety. In that various intercourse which we are obliged to carry on with persons of every different character, suspicion, to a certain degree, is a necessary guard. It is only when it exceeds the bounds of prudent caution, that it degenerates into vice. There is a proper mean between undistinguishing credulity and universal jealousy, which a sound understanding discerns, and which the man of candour studies to preserve.

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He makes allowance for the mixture of evil with good, which is to be found in every human character. He expects none to be faultless; and he is unwilling to believe that there is any without some commendable quality. In the midst of many defects, he can discover a virtue. Under the influence of personal resentment, he can be just to the merit of an enemy. He never lends an open ear to those defamatory reports and dark suggestions, which, among the tribes of the censorious, circulate with so much rapidity, and meet with such ready acceptance. He is not hasty to judge, and he requires full evidence before he will condemn. As long as an action can be ascribed to different motives, he holds it as no mark of sagacity to impute it always to the worst. Where there is just ground for doubt, he keeps his judgment undecided; and, during the period of suspense, leans to the most charitable construction which an action can bear. When he must condemn, he condemns with regret; and without those aggravations which the severity of others adds to the crime. He listens
calmly

calmly to the apology of the offender, and readily admits every extenuating circumstance which equity can suggest. How much soever he may blame the principles of any sect or party, he never confounds, under one general censure, all who belong to that party or sect. He charges them not with such consequences of their tenets, as they refuse and disavow. From one wrong opinion, he does not infer the subversion of all sound principles; nor, from one bad action, conclude that all regard to conscience is overthrown. When he *beholds the mote in his brother's eye*, he remembers *the beam in his own*. He commiserates human frailty; and judges of others, according to the principles by which he would think it reasonable that they should judge of him. In a word, he views men and actions in the clear sunshine of charity and good-nature; and not in that dark and sullen shade which jealousy and party-spirit throw over all characters.—Such being, in general, the spirit of that charity which *thinketh no evil*, I proceed,

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II. To recommend, by various arguments, this important branch of Christian virtue.

Let us begin with observing what a necessary requisite it is to the proper discharge of all the social duties. I need not spend time in showing that these hold a very high rank in the Christian system. The encomium which the Apostle in this chapter bestows upon charity, is alone sufficient to prove it. He places this grace at the head of all the gifts and endowments which can be possessed by man ; and assures us, that *though we had all faith, so that we could remove mountains, yet if we be destitute of charity, it will profit us nothing.* Accordingly, *love, gentleness, meekness, and long-suffering*, are enumerated as distinguishing *fruits of the spirit of Christ.* But it is impossible for such virtues as these to find place in a breast, where the propensity to think evil of others is predominant. Charitable and candid thoughts of men are the necessary introduction to all good-will and kindness. They form, if we may speak so, the only climate in which love can

can grow up and flourish. A suspicious temper checks in the bud every kind affection. It hardens the heart, and estranges man from man. What friendship or gratitude can you expect from him, who views all your conduct with distrustful eyes, and ascribes every benefit you confer to artifice and stratagem? The utmost which you can hope from one of this character, is justice in his dealings: nor even that can you be assured of; as the suspicions to which he is a prey will afford him frequent pretexts for departing from truth, and for defending himself with the same arms which he conceives to be employed against him. Unhappy will they be who are joined with him by any close connexion; exposed to every malignant suspicion which arises in his own mind, and to every unjust suggestion which the malice of others may insinuate against them. That store of poison which is collected within him, frequently throws out its venom on all who are within its reach. As a companion, he will be severe and satirical; as a friend, captious and dangerous; in his domestic sphere, harsh, jealous,

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jealous, and irascible; in his civil capacity, seditious and turbulent, prone to impute the conduct of his superiours to improper motives, and upon loose information to condemn their conduct.

The contrary of all this may be expected from a candid temper. Whatever is amiable in manners, or useful in society, naturally and easily ingrafts itself upon it. Gentleness, humanity, and compassion, flow from it as their native spring. Open and cheerful in itself, it diffuses cheerfulness and good-humour over all who are under its influence. It is the chief ground of mutual confidence and union among men. It prevents those animosities from arising, which are the offspring of groundless prejudice; or, by its benign interposition, allays them when arisen. In the magistrate, it tempers justice with lenity. Among subjects, it promotes good order and submission. It connects humanity with piety. For he who is not given to think evil of his fellow-creatures, will not be ready to censure the dispensations of his Creator. Whereas the same turn of mind which renders

ders one jealous and unjust towards men, will incline him to be querulous and impious towards God.

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IN the second place, As a suspicious uncharitable spirit is inconsistent with all social virtue and happiness, so, in itself, it is unreasonable and unjust. In order to form sound opinions concerning characters and actions, two things are especially requisite, information and impartiality. But such as are most forward to decide unfavourably, are commonly destitute of both. Instead of possessing, or even requiring, full information, the grounds on which they proceed are frequently the most slight and frivolous. A tale, perhaps, which the idle have invented, the inquisitive have listened to, and the credulous have propagated, or a real incident which rumour, in carrying it along, has exaggerated and disguised, supplies them with materials of confident assertion, and decisive judgment. From an action, they presently look into the heart, and infer the motive. This supposed motive they conclude to be the ruling principle ;

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ciple ; and pronounce at once concerning the whole character.

Nothing can be more contrary both to equity and to sound reason, than such precipitate judgments. Any man who attends to what passes within himself, may easily discern what a complicated system the human character is, and what a variety of circumstances must be taken into the account, in order to estimate it truly. No single instance of conduct whatever, is sufficient to determine it. As from one worthy action, it were credulity, not charity, to conclude a person to be free from all vice ; so from one which is censurable, it is perfectly unjust to infer that the author of it is without conscience and without merit. Did you know all the attending circumstances, it might appear in an excusable light ; nay, perhaps, under a commendable form. The motives of the actor may have been entirely different from those which you ascribe to him ; and, where you suppose him impelled by bad design, he may have been prompted by conscience and mistaken principle. Admitting the action
to

to have been in every view criminal, he may have been hurried into it through inadvertency and surprise. He may have sincerely repented; and the virtuous principle may have now regained its full vigour. Perhaps this was the corner of frailty; the quarter on which he lay open to the incursions of temptation; while the other avenues of his heart were firmly guarded by conscience.

No error is more palpable than to look for uniformity from human nature; though it is commonly on the supposition of it that our general conclusions concerning character are formed. Mankind are consistent neither in good nor in evil. In the present state of frailty, all is mixed and blended. The strongest contrarieties of piety and hypocrisy, of generosity and avarice, of truth and duplicity, often meet in one character. The purest human virtue is consistent with some vice; and, in the midst of much vice and disorder, amiable, nay respectable, qualities may be found. There are few cases in which we have ground to conclude that all goodness is lost. At the bottom of the
character

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character there may lie some sparks of piety and virtue, suppressed, but not extinguished; which, kept alive by the breath of Heaven, and gathering strength in secret from reflection, may, on the first favourable opening which is afforded them, be ready to break forth with splendour and force.—Placed, then, in a situation of so much uncertainty and darkness, where our knowledge of the hearts and characters of men is so limited, and our judgments concerning them are so apt to err, what a continual call do we receive, either to suspend our judgment, or to give it on the favourable side? especially when we consider, that as, through imperfect information, we are unqualified for deciding soundly, so, through want of impartiality, we are often tempted to decide wrong. How much this enforces the argument for Candour will appear by considering,

IN the third place, What the sources are of those severe and uncharitable opinions which we are so ready to form. Were the mind altogether free from prepossession and bias,

bias, it might avail itself to more advantage of the scanty knowledge which it possesses. But this is so far from being the case, that on every side we are encumbered with prejudices, and warped by passions, which exert their influence in nothing more than in leading us to think evil of others. At all times we are justly said to *see through a glass darkly*; but passion and prejudice, looking through a glass which distorts the form of the objects, make us also see falsely.

It is one of the misfortunes of our present situation, that some of the good dispositions of human nature are apt to betray us into frailties and vices. Thus it often happens, that the laudable attachment which we contract to the country, or the church, to which we belong, or to some political denomination under which we class ourselves, both confines our affections within too narrow a sphere, and gives rise to violent prejudices against such as come under an opposite description. Not contented with being in the right ourselves, we must find all others in the wrong. We claim an ex-

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clusive possession of goodness and wisdom ; and, from approving warmly of those who join us, we proceed to condemn, with much acrimony, not only the principles, but the characters, of those from whom we differ. Hence persons of well-disposed minds are too often, through the strength of partial good affection, involved in the crime of uncharitable judgment. They rashly extend to every individual the severe opinion which they have unwarrantably conceived of a whole body.—This man is of a party whose principles we reckon slavish ; and therefore his whole sentiments are corrupted. That man belongs to a religious sect which we are accustomed to deem bigotted ; and therefore he is incapable of any generous or liberal thought. Another is connected with a sect which we have been taught to account relaxed ; and therefore he can have no sanctity.—Are these the judgments of candour and charity ? Is true piety or virtue so very limited in its nature, as to be confined to such alone as see every thing with our eyes, and follow exactly the train of our ideas ? Was there ever any great



great community so corrupt as not to include within it individuals of real worth?

Besides prepossessions of this nature, which sometimes mislead the honest mind, there are other, and much more culpable, causes of uncharitable judgment. Pride is hurt and wounded by every excellence in which it can claim no share; and, from eagerness to discover a blemish, rests upon the slightest appearance of one, as a satisfying proof. When rivalry and competition concur with pride, our desire to espay defects increases, and, by consequence, the grounds of censure multiply. Where no opposition of interests takes place, envy has too much influence in warping the judgment of many. Even when none of these causes operate, the inward consciousness of depravity is sufficient to fill the mind with evil thoughts of others. Whence should a man so readily draw his opinion of men as from that character with which he is best acquainted, because it is his own? A person of low and base mind naturally imputes to others the sentiments which he finds congenial to himself; and is incredulous

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lous of every excellency which to him is totally unknown. He enjoys, besides, consolation in the thought that others are no better than himself; that his weaknesses and crimes are those of all men; and that such as appear most distinguished for virtue, possess no real superiority, except greater dexterity in concealing their vices. Soothing themselves with this doctrine in secret, too many foster and strengthen the bad opinion which they entertain of all mankind. Rarely, if ever, have you ground to think well of that man's heart, who is, on every occasion, given to think the worst of others. Let us observe,

IN the fourth place, That suitable to the sources whence a jealous and suspicious temper proceeds, are the effects which it produces in the world, the crimes and mischiefs with which it fills society. It possesses this unhappy distinction beyond the other failings of the human heart, that while it impels men to violent deeds, it justifies to their own apprehension the excesses which they commit. Amidst the
uproar

uproar of other bad passions, conscience acts as a restraining power. As soon as the tumult subsides, remorse exerts its influence, and renders the sinner sensible of the evil which he has done. But the uncharitable man is unfortunately set loose from any such check or controul. Through the infatuation of prejudice, his judgment is perverted; conscience is misled; *the light within him is turned into darkness*. Viewing the objects of his displeasure as evil men, he thinks himself entitled to give that displeasure full vent; and in committing the most inhuman actions, may sometimes imagine that he is doing good service to God.

The first fruits of an evil-thinking spirit are calumny and detraction, by which society is so often embroiled, and men are set at variance with one another. But, did it proceed no farther than censorious speech, the mischief would be less. Much greater and more serious evils frequently ensue. What direful effects, for instance, have often flowed from rash and ill-founded jealousy in private life! No sooner has one al-

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lowed that dæmon to take possession of his mind, than it perverts his understanding, and taints all his faculties. Haunting him by night and by day, bringing perpetually before him the odious and disquieting forms which it has raised up, it blackens every appearance to his view; gives to trifles, which are in themselves light as air, the weight of full confirmation; till what was at first a dubious surmise, or a slight displeasure, rises at length into full belief and implacable fury. Hence families torn with the most violent convulsions; the husband armed against the wife, the father against the son, the friend against the friend; the plan of treachery and assassination contrived, and the dagger plunged into the bosom of the innocent.—In public life, how often have kingdoms been shaken with all the violence of war and rebellion, from the unjust suspicions which subjects had conceived of their rulers; or the rash jealousy which princes had entertained of their people!—But it is in religious dissensions chiefly, that the mischievous power of uncharitable prejudice has displayed its full atrocity.

city. Religion is always found to heighten every passion on which it acts, and to render every contest into which it enters, uncommonly ardent; because the objects which it presents are of such a nature, as strongly to seize and engage the human mind. When zeal for their own principles has prompted men to view those of a different persuasion in the odious lights which bigotry suggests, every sentiment of humanity has too often been extinguished. The mild influence of that religion which breathes nothing but gentleness, has proved too feeble to restrain the violent and bloody hand of persecution; and the uncharitable spirit, raging among contending parties, has filled the world with such calamities and crimes, as have brought disgrace on the Christian name.

Let us attend particularly to one awful instance of the guilt which men may contract, and of the ruin which they may bring upon themselves, through the want of fairness and candour. The nation of the Jews were almost noted for a narrow and uncharitable spirit. When John the Baptist, and

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our blessed Lord, appeared among them, because the former was austere in his temper, and retired in his life, they pronounced of him that he had an evil spirit; and, because the latter was open and sociable in his manners, they held him to be destitute of that sanctity which became a prophet. Their prejudice against our Lord took its first rise from a most frivolous and contemptible cause. *Is not this the son of the Carpenter? Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?* When his miracles repelled this reproach, and sufficiently proved the eminence of his character, still they fostered their prejudices by this most futile reasoning, *Have any of the rulers believed on him?* Obstinate in their attachment to a temporal Messiah, and continuing to view all our Saviour's conduct with an evil eye, when he conversed with bad men in order to reclaim them, they treated him as a *companion of publicans and sinners*. Because he disallowed their groundless traditions, they held him to be a breaker of the Sabbath, and a contemner of religion. Because he prophesied the destruction of their temple, they

they accused him of being an enemy to his own nation. Till at last, through their perpetual misconstruction of his actions, their passions became so inflamed as to make them cry out with one voice, *Away with this man to the death, and give us Barabbas the robber.*—Viewing in this dreadful event the consequences of want of candour, let every man tremble to think evil rashly of his brother. No one can tell how far uncharitable prejudices may carry him in guilt, if he allow them to harbour and gather strength within his breast. The cloud which *rose from the sea, no bigger than a man's hand*, may soon swell and spread, till it cover the whole horizon, and discharge with most destructive violence the gathered storm.

IN the fifth place, As a suspicious spirit is the source of so many crimes and calamities in the world, so it is the spring of certain misery to the person who indulges it. His friends will be few; and small will be his comfort in those whom he possesses. Believing others to be his enemies, he will
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of course make them such. Let his caution be ever so great, the asperity of his thoughts will often break out in his behaviour; and, in return for suspecting and hating, he will incur suspicion and hatred. Besides the external evils which he draws upon himself, arising from alienated friendship, broken confidence, and open enmity; the suspicious temper itself is one of the worst evils which any man can suffer. If *in all fear there be torment*, how miserable must be his state who, by living in perpetual jealousy, lives in perpetual dread! Looking upon himself to be surrounded with spies, enemies, and designing men, he is a stranger to reliance and trust. He knows not to whom to open himself. He dresses his countenance in forced smiles, while his heart throbs within from apprehensions of secret treachery. Hence fretfulness and ill-humour, disgust at the world, and all the painful sensations of an irritated and embittered mind.

So numerous and great are the evils arising from a suspicious disposition, that of the two extremes it is more eligible to expose ourselves to occasional disadvantage

tage from thinking too well of others, than to suffer continual misery by thinking always ill of them. It is better to be sometimes imposed upon, than never to trust. Safety is purchased at too dear a rate, when, in order to secure it, we are obliged to be always clad in armour, and to live in perpetual hostility with our fellows. This is, for the sake of living, to deprive ourselves of the comfort of life. The man of candour enjoys his situation, whatever it is, with cheerfulness and peace. Prudence directs his intercourse with the world; but no black suspicions haunt his hours of rest. Accustomed to view the characters of his neighbours in the most favourable light, he is like one who dwells amidst those beautiful scenes of nature, on which the eye rests with pleasure. Whereas the suspicious man, having his imagination filled with all the shocking forms of human falsehood, deceit, and treachery, resembles the traveller in the wilderness, who discerns no objects around him but what are either dreary or terrible; caverns that open, serpents that hiss, and beasts of prey that howl. Hence
in

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in him are verified those descriptions which the Spirit of God has given us of the misery of the wicked. *They shall have no peace. They shall be like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest. The Lord shall give them a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: And they shall fear day and night, and have none assurance of heart.*—I add,

IN the sixth and last place, That there is nothing which exposes men in a more marked and direct manner to the displeasure of the Almighty, than a malignant and censorious spirit. I insist not now on the general denunciations of divine wrath against malice and hatred. Let us only consider under what particular description the Spirit of God brings this crime of uncharitable judgment. It is declared to be an impious invasion of the prerogative of God, to whom alone it belongs to search all hearts, and to determine concerning all characters. This privilege He often appropriates expressly to Himself, on purpose to restrain the rashness of censure
among

among men; requiring us to leave the judging of others to Him, and to attend to our own business and duty. *Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master, he standeth or falleth. Judge nothing before the time; until the Lord come, who shall make manifest the counsels of the heart.*

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Rom. xiv.

4.

1 Cor. iv. 5.

It deserves our most serious attention, that in several passages of Scripture, the great Judge of the world is represented, at the day of final retribution, as proceeding upon this principle, of rendering to men according to the manner in which they have acted towards their brethren. *With the merciful, thou wilt shew thyself merciful; and with the froward, thou wilt shew thyself froward. With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.*

Psalm xviii.
25, 26.

Matt. vii. 2.

It is impossible to form an argument of more force than this, to restrain all severity of judgment among such as look forward to the tribunal of God. The argument extends not indeed so far, as to represent our acceptance with the Deity as entirely

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tirely suspended upon the candour which we show in forming our sentiments of others. We know that other graces besides this are requisite, in order to fit us for heaven; and that without piety towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, all our charity to men will be found defective and vain. But this we know also, that in the heart which is destitute of fairness and candour, the Spirit of God certainly dwells not; and that whatever appearances of religion the uncharitable man may assume, on him the Sovereign of the universe looks with no favour.—Thou who art a man full of frailties, who standest in need, not merely of impartiality in thy divine Judge, but of indulgence and mercy: Thou who implorest daily this mercy from Him, and prayest that He would *remember thou art dust*, and not be strict to *mark iniquity against thee*; darest thou, with those very prayers in thy mouth, proceed to judge without candour of thy brethren, and upon the slightest grounds to reprobate and condemn them? O thou hypocrite! (for by what other name can we call thee?) vain are all thy pretensions

sions to piety. Ineffectual is every plea which thou canst form for mercy from Heaven. The precedent which thou hast established against thyself is decisive. Thou hast dictated the sentence of thine own condemnation.

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ON the whole, it clearly appears that no part of the government of temper deserves attention more, than to keep our minds pure from uncharitable prejudices, and open to candour and humanity in judging of others. The worst consequences, both to ourselves and to society, follow from the opposite spirit. Let us beware of encouraging a habit of suspicions, by forming too severe and harsh opinions concerning human nature in general. A great proportion of infirmity and corruption, doubtless, adheres to it; yet tempered also it is with various mixtures of virtue and good affection. Darkened as the Divine Image now is among mankind, it is not wholly effaced. Much piety and goodness may lie hidden in hearts that are unknown to us. Vice is glaring and loud. The crimes of the wicked
make

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1 Kings,
xix. 18.

make a noise in the world, and alarm society. True worth is retired and modest, and requires particular situations to bring it forth to public notice. The prophet Elijah, in a time of prevailing corruption, imagined that all true religion had forsaken the land. *I, even I only*, said he to the Lord, *am left to serve thee*. But the Almighty, who discerned what was concealed from his imperfect view, replied, *Yet have I left me seven thousand men in Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal*.

The aged, and the unfortunate, who have toiled through an unsuccessful life with long experience of the falsehood and fraud of evil men, are apt to be the most severe in the opinions which they entertain of others. For such, their circumstances may be allowed to form some degree of apology. But if, in youth and prosperity, the same hard suspicious spirit prevail; if they who are beginning the career of life set out with all the scruples of distrust; if, before they have had reason to complain of the world, they betray the diffidence of a jealous, and the malignity of a censorious mind; sad is

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the presage which may thence be drawn of their future dishonour. From such, you have nothing to look for that shall be either engaging in private life, or respectable in public character. To youth it particularly belongs to be generous in sentiment, candid in opinion, undesigning in behaviour, open to the most favourable construction of actions and conduct. Throughout all the stages of life, candour is one of the most honourable distinctions of the human character: it is connected with magnanimity; it is justified by wisdom; it is suitable to the relation in which we stand to one another. But if reason and humanity be insufficient to restrain us from rash and uncharitable judgments, let that awful denunciation frequently resound in our ears, *He shall have judgment without mercy who hath shewed no mercy.*

SERMON XI.

On the CHARACTER of JOSEPH.

GENESIS, xlv. 5. 8.

Now therefore be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you to preserve life.— So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God.

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IN this generous manner, Joseph frames an apology for the unnatural behaviour of his brethren. He extenuates the atrocity of their crime, by representing the happy effects which it had produced. He looks beyond all second causes; and recognizes, in the wonderful events of his life, the hand of the Almighty.—No human character exhibited in the records of Scripture, is more remarkable and instructive than that of this

this patriarch. He is one whom we behold tried in all the vicissitudes of fortune; from the condition of a slave, rising to be ruler of the land of Egypt; and in every station acquiring, by his virtue and wisdom, favour with God and man. When overseer of Potiphar's house, his fidelity was proved by strong temptations, which he honourably resisted. When thrown into prison by the artifice of a false woman, his integrity and prudence soon rendered him conspicuous, even in that dark mansion. When called into the presence of Pharaoh, the wise and extensive plan which he formed for saving the kingdom from the miseries of impending famine, justly raised him to a high station, wherein his abilities were eminently displayed in the public service. But in his whole history there is no circumstance so striking and interesting, as his behaviour to his brethren, who had sold him into slavery. The moment in which he made himself known to them, that moment at which we are now to contemplate him, was the most critical one of his life, and the most decisive of his character. It is such as rarely occurs

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in the course of human events; and is calculated to draw the highest attention of all who are endowed with any degree of sensibility of heart. Let us consider the sentiment which Joseph utters in the Text under two views, each of which is very instructive to all Christians. I. As a discovery of his cordial forgiveness of his brethren; and, II. As an instance of his dutiful attention to the Providence of God.

I. THE most cordial forgiveness is here displayed. I shall not recapitulate all the preceding history respecting Joseph and his brethren; as it is well known by every one who has the least acquaintance with the sacred writings. From the whole tenour of the narration it appears, that though Joseph, upon the arrival of his brethren in Egypt, made himself strange to them, yet from the beginning he intended to discover himself; and studied so to conduct the discovery as might render the surprise of joy complete. For this end, by affected severity, he took measures for bringing down into Egypt all his father's children. They were

were now arrived there; and Benjamin among the rest, who was his younger brother by the same mother, and was particularly beloved by Joseph. Him he threatened to detain; and seemed willing to allow the rest to depart. This incident renewed their distress. They all knew their father's extreme anxiety about the safety of Benjamin, and with what difficulty he had yielded to his undertaking this journey. Should he be prevented from returning, they dreaded that grief would overpower the old man's spirits, and prove fatal to his life. Judah, therefore, who had particularly urged the necessity of Benjamin's accompanying his brothers, and had solemnly pledged himself to their father for his safe return, craved, upon this occasion, an audience of the governor; and gave him a full account of the circumstances of Jacob's family.

Nothing can be more interesting and pathetic than this discourse of Judah, as it is recorded in the preceding chapter. Little knowing to whom he spoke, he paints, in all the colours of simple and natural elo-

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quence, the distressed situation of the aged patriarch, hastening to the close of life; long afflicted for the loss of a favourite son, whom he supposed to have been torn in pieces by a beast of prey; labouring now under anxious concern about his youngest son, the child of his old age, who alone was left alive of his mother, and whom nothing but the calamities of severe famine could have moved a tender father to send from home, and expose to the dangers of a foreign land. *If we bring him not back with us, we shall bring down the grey hairs of thy servant, our father, with sorrow to the grave. I pray thee, therefore, let thy servant abide instead of the young man, a bondman to our lord. For how shall I go up to my father, and Benjamin not with me? lest I see the evil that shall come on my father.*

Upon this relation, Joseph could no longer restrain himself. The tender ideas of his father and his father's house, of his ancient home, his country and his kindred, of the distress of his family, and his own exaltation, all rushed too strongly upon his mind to bear any farther concealment. *He*
cried,

cried, Cause every man to go out from me; and he wept aloud. The tears which he shed, were not the tears of grief. They were the burst of affection. They were the effusions of a heart overflowing with all the tender sensibilities of nature. Formerly he had been moved in the same manner, when he first saw his brethren before him. *His bowels yearned upon them; he sought for a place where to weep. He went into his chamber; and then washed his face and returned to them.* At that period, his generous plans were not completed. But now, when there was no farther occasion for constraining himself, he gave free vent to the strong emotions of his heart. The first minister to the king of Egypt was not ashamed to show, that he felt as a man, and a brother. *He wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard him.*

The first words which his swelling heart allowed him to pronounce, are the most suitable to such an affecting situation which were ever uttered;—*I am Joseph; doth my father yet live?*—What could he, what



ought he, in that impassioned moment, to have said more? This is the voice of nature herself, speaking her own language; and it penetrates the heart: No pomp of expression; no parade of kindness; but strong affection hastening to utter what it strongly felt. *His brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence.* Their silence is as expressive of those emotions of repentance and shame, which, on this amazing discovery, filled their breasts, and stopped their utterance, as the few words which Joseph speaks are expressive of the generous agitations which struggle for vent within him. No painter could seize a more striking moment for displaying the characteristic features of the human heart, than what is here presented. Never was there a situation of more tender and virtuous joy, on the one hand; nor, on the other, of more overwhelming confusion and conscious guilt. In the simple narration of the sacred historian, it is set before us with greater energy and higher effect, than if it had been wrought up with all the colouring of the most admired modern eloquence.

When

When Joseph had a little recovered himself from the first transports of emotion, he proceeds to explain his situation to his brethren, and to show them the beneficent purposes for which he conceived himself to be raised by Providence into power. The apology which he makes in the Text for their former cruelty is uncommon and remarkable. *Now therefore be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God; and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.* This apology was, in truth, no satisfactory excuse for their crime. For though the over-ruling Providence of Heaven had so directed the course of events, as to render their bad intentions subservient to a happy issue; yet the badness of the intention originated entirely from themselves. The envy and jealousy which they entertained against their brother,

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James, i. 13.

ther, led them to the commission of an atrocious deed. The deed was voluntary; the crime was all their own; and the interposition of Providence, in making unforeseen consequences follow from that crime, did not, could not exculpate them from guilt. It were an impious conclusion, that because God extracts good from our evil, we are not answerable for the evil which we perpetrate. *God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.* But the sentiment in the Text is to be considered as a colour which the generous humanity of Joseph prompted him to throw on the conduct of his brethren. He saw the confusion with which they were overwhelmed in his presence. He diverts their attention from the remembrance of a crime which was now wringing their hearts with anguish, by representing to them the happy effects which that crime had produced. He sets them free from all uneasiness on his account. He calls upon them to rejoice in his prosperity; and, instead of dwelling on a painful recollection of their own

own conduct, to join with him in acknowledging and adoring the hand of the Almighty.

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How different is this amiable spirit which Joseph discovers, from that harsh and ostentatious superiority which too often accompanies the pretended forgiveness of injuries among those who call themselves Christians! They are ready to say, that, for their part, they pardon the wrongs which have been done them; they wish that the persons who have committed them may be able to forgive themselves; they leave them to God and to their own conscience. By the severe suggestions which they throw out, they discover the inward bitterness of their spirit; and artfully gratify resentment, at the time when they profess to exercise forgiveness. Whereas the great and good man, whose character we now consider, effaces all memory of the crimes which he pardons. He seeks to alleviate the remorse of his brethren by an extenuation of their guilt; and, while he is preparing to make their circumstances comfortable, studies



dies at the same time to render their minds easy and tranquil.

This was not merely a transient emotion with Joseph, owing to the first burst of affection on discovering himself to his brethren. We have a clear proof, from a remarkable transaction which passed many years after this period, of his disposition continuing the same to the end of life. It is recorded in the last chapter of this book, that when Jacob died, his sons began to be seized with fear concerning the treatment which they might receive from their brother. The guilty are always suspicious. Conscious of their own baseness, they are incapable of conceiving the magnanimity of others. They saw the bond, which held the family together, now broken by their father's death. They dreaded that the resentment of Joseph against them had hitherto been only suppressed, or concealed. *They said among themselves, peradventure he will now hate us, and requite all the evil which we did unto him.* Under this apprehension, they first sent a humble message to

to deprecate his displeasure by the memory of their common father; and then appearing in his presence, they fell down before his face, professing themselves to be his servants, and praying him to forgive the trespass which they had committed against him. But no such hidden resentment as they dreaded had ever lurked in the soul of Joseph. On the contrary, when he beheld his brethren in this affecting situation, bereaved of their ancient protector, and reduced, as they imagined, to the necessity of holding up their hands to him for mercy, he was overpowered by a tide of tender emotions. *Joseph wept while his brethren spake unto him.* These affectionate tears alone were sufficient to have assured them of his forgiveness. But hastening also by words to dispel their alarms, he presently added, *Fear not; for, though ye thought evil against me, God meant it unto good. Now therefore fear ye not; I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.*

Genesis,
l. 21.

Such was the last incident that is recorded in the life of this eminent personage,
than

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than whom you will find few more distinguished by an assemblage of illustrious virtues; in the lowest adversity, patient and faithful; in the highest prosperity, beneficent and generous; dutiful and affectionate as a son; kind and forgiving as a brother; accomplished as a statesman; wise and provident as a ruler of the land. In such a character you behold human nature possessing its highest honours. The sentiments which it inspires tend to ennoble our minds; and to prevent their imbibing the spirit of those hard, interested, and self-seeking men with whom the world abounds.

THE striking example of forgiveness which the Text displays, ought frequently to occur to our thoughts, amidst the various occasions of provocation and offence which arise in our intercourse with the world. If one so worthy and amiable, in the days too of his youth and innocence, suffered such cruel treatment from his brothers, ought we to be surprised if, even from our nearest relations, we meet with injustice or ingratitude?

titude? Wrongs and injuries are, more or less, the portion of all. Like Death, they are an evil unavoidable. No station is so high, no power so great, no character so unblemished, as to exempt us from them. In the world, ungrateful men, false friends, and violent enemies, abound. Every wise man ought to prepare himself for what he is to encounter in passing through this thorny region. He is not to expect that he can *gather grapes from thistles*; nor to lose the government of his mind, because, in the midst of evil men, he is not allowed to remain, like a secret and inviolable person, untouched and uninjured.

As this view of our situation ought to blunt the edge of passion and impatience, so the alleviating circumstances which reason will suggest, ought to mollify resentment. Think of the various constructions which the actions of men will bear. Consider how different the motives of him who hath given us offence, may have been from those which, in the heat of passion, we ascribe to him; how apt all men are to be seduced by mistaken views of interest, and
how

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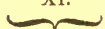
how little ground we have to complain, if, upon a supposed interfering of interests, we suffer by others preferring their own to ours. Remember that no opinions which you form under the power of resentment can be depended upon as just; and that every one loads the intentions of his enemy with imaginary degrees of malice.

But, admitting the injury you have received to be ever so atrocious in its nature, and aggravated in its circumstances; supposing it to be even parallel to that which Joseph suffered; look up, like him, to that divine government under which we are all placed. If forgiveness be a duty which we know God to have required under the most awful sanctions, dare we draw upon ourselves the merited vengeance of that Superiour to whose clemency we are obliged daily to fly? When, with hard and unrelenting dispositions towards our brethren, we send up to Heaven prayers for mercy to ourselves, those prayers return like imprecations upon our heads; and our very devotions seal our condemnation.

The most plain and natural sentiments of equity concur with divine authority to enforce the duty which I now recommend. Let him who has never in his life done wrong, be allowed the privilege of remaining inexorable. But let such as are conscious of frailties and crimes, consider forgiveness as a debt which they owe to others. Common failings are the strongest lesson of mutual forbearance. Were this virtue unknown among men, order and comfort, peace and repose, would be strangers to human life. Injuries retaliated according to the exorbitant measure which passion prescribes, would justify resentment in return. The injured person would become the injurer; and thus wrongs, retaliations, and fresh injuries, would circulate in endless succession, till the world was rendered a field of blood. Of all the passions which invade the human breast, revenge is the most direful. When allowed to reign with full dominion, it is more than sufficient to poison the few pleasures which remain to man in his present state. How much soever a person may suffer from injustice,

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he is always in hazard of suffering more from the prosecution of revenge. The violence of an enemy cannot inflict what is equal to the torment he creates to himself, by means of the fierce and desperate passions which he allows to rage in his soul.

Those evil spirits who inhabit the regions of misery, are represented as delighting in revenge and cruelty. But all that is great and good in the universe, is on the side of clemency and mercy. The Almighty Ruler of the world, though for ages offended by the unrighteousness, and insulted by the impiety of men, is *long-suffering, and slow to anger*. His Son, when he appeared in our nature, exhibited, both in his life and his death, the most illustrious example of forgiveness which the world ever beheld. If you look into the history of mankind, you will find that, in every age, those who have been respected as worthy, or admired as great, have been distinguished for this virtue. Revenge dwells in little minds. A noble and magnanimous spirit is always superiour to it.

It

It suffers not from the injuries of men those severe shocks which others feel. Collected within itself, it stands unmoved by their impotent assaults; and, with generous pity, rather than with anger, looks down on their unworthy conduct. It has been truly said, that the greatest man on earth can no sooner commit an injury, than a good man can make himself greater, by forgiving it. Joseph, at the moment when we now contemplate him, had entirely under his power all those unnatural brethren who had been guilty towards him of the most cruel outrage which men could perpetrate. He could have retained them for ever in that Egyptian bondage to which they had once consigned him; and have gratified revenge by every accumulation of disgrace which despotic power enabled him to inflict. Had he acted this part, he might for a while have been soothed by the pleasures of his high station; but remorse, in the end, would have stung his soul. Cruelty would have rendered him unhappy within himself, as well as odious to others; and his name would have perished among the crowd of

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those contemptible statesmen whose actions stain the annals of history. Whereas now, his character stands among the foremost in the ranks of spotless fame. His memory is blessed to all generations. His example continues to edify the world, and he himself shines in the celestial regions, *as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars, for ever and ever.* Let us now,

II. CONSIDER the sentiment contained in the Text, not only as a discovery of cordial forgiveness, but as an expression of devout attention to the conduct of Providence. *So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God.* Remark how beautifully piety and humanity are, in this instance, connected together. As we are told of Cornelius, the good Centurion, that *his prayers and his alms, his devotion and his good works, came up together in memorial before God*; so here we perceive fraternal affection and religious reverence, mingling in one emotion within the patriarch's heart. In a person of low and vulgar mind, the sensations on such an occasion would have been

been extremely different. Looking back on the past events of his life, he would have ascribed all the adversity which he had suffered to the perverse treatment of his brothers; and all the prosperity which he afterwards attained, to his own good conduct and wisdom; and by consequence would have remained embittered against the instruments of the one, and filled with pride and self-sufficiency on account of the other. But the elevated and noble mind of Joseph rejected such unworthy sentiments. Contemplating the hand of God in all that had befallen him, he effaced the remembrance of those evil deeds which had produced his adversity; and for his prosperity he affected no praise to himself, but ascribed it entirely to the will of Heaven. Let us take notice, that this is not the reflection of a private, retired man, whose situation might be supposed to favour such devout meditations. It is the reflection of one, who was leading a busy and a seducing life, in the midst of a court; the favourite of the greatest monarch who was then known in the world. Yet him you behold, amidst

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the submission and adulation which was paid to him, preserving the moderation and simplicity of a virtuous mind; and, amidst the idolatry and false philosophy of the Egyptians, maintaining the principles of true religion, and giving glory to the God of Israel.

From this unity of piety with humanity, which is so conspicuous in the sentiments of Joseph, there arises one very important instruction; that a devout regard to the hand of God in the various events of life, tends to promote good dispositions and affections towards men. It will be found by those who attend to the workings of human nature, that a great proportion of those malignant passions which break out in the intercourse of men, arises from confining their attention wholly to second causes, and overlooking the first cause of all. Hence, they are insolent in prosperity, because they discern nothing higher than their own abilities; and in adversity they are peevish and unforgiving, because they have no object on which to fix their view, but the conduct of men who have acted as their enemies.

They

They behold no plan of wisdom or goodness carried on throughout nature, which can allay the discomposure of their mind. As soon as their temper is ruffled, the world appears to them to be a continued scene of disasters and injuries, of confused events, and of unreasonable men. Whereas, to the pious man, the contemplation of the universe exhibits a very different spectacle. In the midst of seeming confusion he traces a principle of order; and by attention to that order, his mind is harmonized and calmed. He beholds a wise and righteous Governour presiding over all the commotions which are raised by the tumult of conflicting passions and interests; guiding, with imperceptible influence, the hand of the violent to beneficent purposes; accomplishing unexpected ends by the most improbable means; obliging *the wrath of man to praise him*; sometimes humbling the mighty, sometimes exalting the low; often *snaring the wicked in the devices which their hands have wrought*. Respectful acknowledgment of this divine government, controls the disorders of inferiour passions. Re-



rence for the decrees of Heaven inspires patience and moderation. Trust in that perfect wisdom and goodness which directs all for the best, diminishes the shock which worldly disasters occasion. The irritation of passion and resentment will always bear proportion to the agitation which we suffer from the changes of fortune. One who connects himself with nothing but second causes, partakes of the violence and irregularity of all the inferiour movements belonging to this great machine. He who refers all to God, dwells, if we may speak so, in that higher sphere where motion begins; he is subject to fewer shocks and concussions, and is only carried along by the motion of the universe.

How can mildness or forgiveness gain place in the temper of that man, who, on occasion of every calamity which he suffers from the ill usage of others, has no sanctuary within his own breast to which he can make retreat from their vexations; who is possessed of no principle which is of sufficient power to bear down the rising tide of peevish and angry passions? The violence
of

of an enemy, or the ingratitude of a friend, the injustice of one man, and the treachery of another, perpetually dwell and rankle in his thoughts. The part which they have acted in bringing on his distress, is frequently more grating to him than the distress itself. Whereas he who in every event looks up to God, has always in his view a great and elevating object which inspires him with magnanimity. His mind lies open to every relieving thought, and is inclined to every suggestion of generosity. He is disposed to say with Joseph, *it was not you that sent me hither, but God*; with David, *it is the Lord; let him do what seemeth good in his eyes*; and, with a greater personage than either of these, *the cup which my Father hath given me to drink, shall I not drink it?* Hence arises superiority to many of the ordinary provocations of the world. For he looks upon the whole of his present life as part of a great plan which is carried on under the direction of Heaven. In this plan he views men as acting their several parts, and contributing to his good or evil. But their parts he considers as subordinate
ones;

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ones; which, though they may justly merit his affection, and may occasionally call forth his resentment, yet afford no proper foundation to violent or malignant passion. He looks upon bad men as only the rod with which the Almighty chastens; like the pestilence, the earthquake, or the storm. In the midst of their injustice and violence he can pity their blindness; and imitate our blessed Lord in praying, *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*

SERMON XII.

On the CHARACTER of HAZAEL.

2 KINGS, viii. 12, 13.

*And Hazael said, Why weepeth my Lord?
And he answered, Because I know the evil
that thou wilt do unto the children of
Israel. Their strong holds wilt thou set
on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay
with the sword, and wilt dash their chil-
dren, and rip up their women with child.
And Hazael said, But what, is thy ser-
vant a dog, that he should do this great
thing? And Elisha answered, The Lord
hath shewed me that thou shalt be king
over Syria.*

IN the days of Joram, king of Israel, flou-
rished the prophet Elisha. His character
was so eminent, and his fame so widely
spread,

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spread, that Benhadad, the king of Syria, though an idolater, sent to consult him concerning the issue of a distemper which threatened his life. The messenger employed on this occasion was Hazael, who appears to have been one of the princes, or chief men, of the Syrian court. Charged with rich gifts from the king, he presents himself before the Prophet, and accosts him in terms of the highest respect. During the conference which they held together, Elisha fixed his eye stedfastly on the countenance of Hazael; and discerning, by a prophetic spirit, his future tyranny and cruelty, he could not contain himself from bursting into a flood of tears. When Hazael, in surprise, inquired into the cause of this sudden emotion, the Prophet plainly informs him of the crimes and barbarities which he foresaw that hereafter he should commit. The soul of Hazael abhorred, at this time, the thoughts of cruelty. Uncorrupted, as yet, by ambition or greatness, his indignation arose at being thought capable of such savage actions as the Prophet had mentioned; and, with much warmth, he replies, *But what, is thy*

thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? Elisha makes no return but to point out a remarkable change which was to take place in his condition; *The Lord hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria.*

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In course of time, all that had been predicted came to pass. Hazael ascended the throne; and ambition took possession of his heart. *He smote the children of Israel in all their coasts. He oppressed them during all the days of king Jehoahaz;* and, from what is left on record of his actions, plainly appears to have proved what the Prophet foresaw him to be, a man of violence, cruelty, and blood.

2 Kings,
xiii. 22.

In this passage of history, an object is presented which deserves our serious attention. We behold a man who, in one state of life, could not look upon certain crimes without surprise and horror; who knew so little of himself, as to believe it impossible for him ever to be concerned in committing them; that same man, by a change of condition, transformed in all his sentiments, and, as he rose in greatness, rising also in guilt; till at last he completed that
whole

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whole character of iniquity which he once detested. Hence the following observations naturally arise. I. That to a mind not entirely corrupted, sentiments of abhorrence at guilt are natural. II. That, notwithstanding those sentiments, the mind may be brought under the dominion of the vices which it had most abhorred. III. That this unhappy revolution is frequently owing to a change of men's external circumstances and condition in the world. These observations are to make the subject of the present Discourse; and will lead us to such a view of human nature, as, it is hoped, may be of general use.

I. SENTIMENTS of abhorrence at guilt are natural to the human mind. Hazael's reply to the Prophet, shews how strongly he felt them. *Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?* Is he, or can he ever be so base and wretched, as to perpetrate crimes which would render him unworthy of bearing the name of a man? This is the voice of human nature, while it is not as yet hardened in iniquity. Some
vices

vices are indeed more odious to the mind than others. Providence has wisely pointed the sharpest edge of this natural aversion against the crimes which are of most pernicious and destructive nature; such as treachery, oppression, and cruelty. But, in general, the distinction between moral good and evil is so strongly marked, as to stamp almost every vice with the character of turpitude. Present to any man, even the most ignorant and untutored, an obvious instance of injustice, falsehood, or impiety; let him view it in a cool moment, when no passion blinds, and no interest warps him; and you will find that his mind immediately revolts against it, as shameful and base, nay, as deserving punishment. Hence, in reasoning on the characters of others, however men may mistake as to facts, yet they generally praise and blame according to the principles of sound morality.

With respect to their own character, a notorious partiality too generally misleads their judgment. But it is remarkable, that no sinner ever avows directly to himself,
that

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that he has been guilty of gross and downright iniquity. Even when engaged by his passions in the commission of the greatest crimes, he always palliates them to his own mind by some extenuation or apology, some pretended necessity, or some borrowed colour of innocence. Such power the undeniable dignity of virtue, and the acknowledged turpitude of vice, possesses over every human heart. These sentiments are the remaining impressions of that law, which was originally written on the mind of man. They are gleams of that light which once shone clear and strong within us; and which, though it be now greatly obscured, yet continues to shoot a feeble ray athwart the darkness of human nature. — But whatever sentiments of abhorrence at vice we may at any time entertain, we have no reason to build upon these a presumptuous confidence of our continuance in virtue. For the next instruction which the Text suggests, is,

II. THAT such is man's ignorance of his own character, such the frailty of his nature,

ture, that he may one day become infamous for those very crimes which at present he holds in detestation. This observation is too well verified by the history of Hazael; and a thousand other instances might be brought to confirm it. Though there is nothing which every person ought to know so thoroughly as his own heart, yet from the conduct of men it appears, that there is nothing with which they are less acquainted. Always more prone to flatter themselves than desirous to discover the truth, they trust to their being possessed of every virtue which has not been put to the trial; and reckon themselves secure against every vice to which they have not hitherto been tempted. As long as their duty hangs in speculation, it appears so plain, and so eligible, that they cannot doubt of performing it. The suspicion never enters their mind, that in the hour of speculation, and in the hour of practice, their sentiments may differ widely. Their present disposition they easily persuade themselves will ever continue the same; and yet that dis-

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position is changing with circumstances every moment.

The man who glows with the warm feelings of devotion, imagines it impossible for him to lose that sense of the divine goodness which at present melts his heart. He whom his friend had lately saved from ruin, is confident that, if some trying emergency shall put his gratitude to proof, he will rather die than abandon his benefactor. He who lives happy and contented in frugal industry, wonders how any man can give himself up to dissolute pleasure. Were any of those persons informed by a superiour spirit, that the time was shortly to come when the one should prove an example of scandalous impiety, the other of treachery to his friend, and the third of all that extravagant luxury which disgraces a growing fortune; each of them would testify as much surprise and abhorrence as Hazael did, upon hearing the predictions of the Prophet. Sincere they might very possibly be in their expressions of indignation; for hypocrisy is not always to be charged on men
whose

whose conduct is inconsistent. Hazael was in earnest, when he resented with such ardour the imputation of cruelty. The Apostle Peter was sincere, when he made the zealous profession, that though he should go to prison and to death with his Master, he would never deny him. They were sincere; that is, they spoke from the fulness of their hearts, and from the warmth of the present moment; but they did not know themselves, as the events which followed plainly shewed. So false to its principles, too frequently, is the heart of man; so weak is the foundation of human virtue; so much reason there is for what the Gospel perpetually inculcates concerning the necessity of distrusting ourselves, and depending on divine aid. Mortifying, I confess, is this view of human nature; yet proper to be attended to by all, in order to escape the most fatal dangers. For, merely through unguarded conduct, and from the want of this prudent suspicion of their own weakness, how many, after the most promising beginnings, have gradually apostatized from every principle of virtue; until,

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at last, it has become as difficult for one to believe, that they ever had any love of goodness, as it would have been once to have persuaded themselves that they were to advance to such a height in wickedness!

IN such cases as I have described, what has become, it may be inquired, of those sentiments of abhorrence at guilt, which were once felt so strongly? Are they totally erased? or, if in any degree they remain, how do such persons contrive to satisfy themselves in acting a part which their minds condemn?—Here, there is a mystery of iniquity which requires to be unfolded. Latent and secret is the progress of corruption within the soul; and the more latent, the more dangerous is its growth. No man becomes of a sudden completely wicked. Guilt never shows its whole deformity at once; but by gradual acquaintance reconciles us to its appearance, and imperceptibly diffuses its poison through all the powers of the mind. Every man has some darling passion, which generally

rally affords the first introduction to vice. The irregular gratifications into which it occasionally seduces him, appear under the form of venial weaknesses; and are indulged, in the beginning, with scrupulousness and reserve. But, by longer practice, these restraints weaken, and the power of habit grows. One vice brings in another to its aid. By a sort of natural affinity they connect and entwine themselves together; till their roots come to be spread wide and deep over all the soul. When guilt rises to be glaring, conscience endeavours to remonstrate. But conscience is a calm principle. Passion is loud and impetuous; and creates a tumult which drowns the voice of reason. It joins, besides, artifice to violence; and seduces at the same time that it impels. For it employs the understanding to impose upon the conscience. It devises reasons and arguments to justify the corruptions of the heart. The common practice of the world is appealed to. Nice distinctions are made. Men are found to be circumstanced in so peculiar a manner, as to render certain actions excusable, if not blameless,

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which, in another situation, it is confessed, would have been criminal. By such a process as this, there is reason to believe, that a great part of mankind advance from step to step in sin, partly hurried by passion, and partly blinded by self-deceit, without any just sense of the degree of guilt which they contract. By inveterate habits, their judgment is at length perverted, and their moral feelings are deadened. They see now with other eyes; and can look without pain on evil actions which they formerly abhorred.

It is proper, however, to observe, that though our native sentiments of abhorrence at guilt may be so borne down, or so eluded, as to lose their influence on conduct, yet those sentiments belonging originally to our frame, and being never totally eradicated from the soul, will still retain so much authority, as if not to reform, at least, on some occasions, to chasten the sinner. It is only during a course of prosperity, that vice is able to carry on its delusions without disturbance. But, amidst the dark and thoughtful situations of life, conscience regains

gains its rights; and pours the whole bitterness of remorse on his heart, who has apostatized from his original principles. We may well believe that, before the end of his days, Hazael's first impressions would be made to return. In the hour of adversity, the remembrance of his conference with the venerable Prophet would sting his heart. Comparing the sentiments which, in those his better days, he felt, with the atrocious cruelties which he had afterwards committed, all the honours of royalty would be unable to save him from the inward sense of baseness and infamy.

FROM this view which has been exhibited of the progress of corruption, and of the danger to which we are exposed, of falling from principles which once appeared firmly established, let us receive useful admonition for our own conduct. *Let not him that girdeth on his harness, boast like him that putteth it off.* Let no man place a rash and dangerous confidence in his virtue. *But let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.* Never adventure on

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too near an approach to what is evil. Familiarize not yourselves with it, in the slightest instances, without fear. Listen with reverence to every reprehension of conscience; and preserve the most quick and accurate sensibility to right and wrong. If ever your moral impressions begin to decay, and your natural abhorrence of guilt to lessen, you have ground to dread that the ruin of virtue is fast approaching. While you employ all the circumspection and vigilance which reason can suggest, let your prayers, at the same time, continually ascend to God for support and aid. Remember that from him *descendeth every good and perfect gift*; and that to him only *it belongs to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy*. I proceed now to the

III^d OBSERVATION from the Text, That the power which corruption acquires to pervert the original principles of man, is frequently owing to a change of their circumstances and condition in the world.

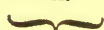
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How different was Hazael the messenger of Benhadad, from Hazael the king; he who started at the mention of cruelty, from him who waded in blood! Of this sad and surprising revolution, the Prophet emphatically assigns the cause in these few words; *The Lord hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria.* That crown, that fatal crown, which is to be set upon thy head, shall shed a malignant influence over thy nature; and shall produce that change in thy character, which now thou canst not believe.—Whose experience of the world is so narrow, as not to furnish him with instances similar to this, in much humbler conditions of life? So great is the influence of a new situation of external fortune; such a different turn it gives to our temper and affections, to our views and desires, that no man can foretel what his character would prove, should Providence either raise or depress his circumstances in a remarkable degree, or throw him into some sphere of action, widely different from that to which he has been accustomed in former life.

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The seeds of various qualities, good and bad, lie in all our hearts. But until proper occasions ripen and bring them forward, they lie there inactive and dead. They are covered up and concealed within the recesses of our nature; or, if they spring up at all, it is under such an appearance as is frequently mistaken, even by ourselves. Pride, for instance, in certain situations, has no opportunity of displaying itself, but as magnanimity, or sense of honour. Avarice appears as necessary and laudable œconomy. What in one station of life would discover itself to be cowardice and baseness of mind, passes in another for prudent circumspection. What in the fulness of power would prove to be cruelty and oppression, is reputed, in a subordinate rank, no more than the exercise of proper discipline. For a while, the man is known neither by the world nor by himself, to be what he truly is. But bring him into a new situation of life, which accords with his predominant disposition; which strikes on certain latent qualities of his soul, and awakens them into action; and as the leaves of a flower gradually

dually unfold to the sun, so shall all his true character open full to view.

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This may, in one light, be accounted not so much an alteration of character produced by a change of circumstances, as a discovery brought forth of the real character, which formerly lay concealed. Yet, at the same time, it is true that the man himself undergoes a change. For opportunity being given for certain dispositions, which had been dormant, to exert themselves without restraint, they of course gather strength. By means of the ascendancy which they gain, other parts of the temper are borne down; and thus an alteration is made in the whole structure and system of the soul. He is a truly wise and good man, who, through divine assistance, remains superiour to this influence of fortune on his character, who having once imbibed worthy sentiments, and established proper principles of action, continues constant to these, whatever his circumstances be; maintains, throughout all the changes of his life, one uniform and supported tenour of conduct; and what he abhorred as evil and wicked in
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the beginning of his days, continues to abhor to the end. But how rare is it to meet with this honourable consistency among men, while they are passing through the different stations and periods of life! When they are setting out in the world, before their minds have been greatly misled or debased, they glow with generous emotions, and look with contempt on what is sordid and guilty. But advancing farther in life, and inured by degrees to the crooked ways of men; pressing through the crowd, and the bustle of the world; obliged to contend with this man's craft, and that man's scorn; accustomed, sometimes, to conceal their sentiments, and often to stifle their feelings, they become at last hardened in heart, and familiar with corruption. Who would not drop a tear over this sad, but frequent fall of human probity and honour? Who is not humbled, when he beholds the refined sentiments and high principles on which we are so ready to value ourselves, brought to such a shameful issue; and man, with all his boasted attainments of reason, discovered so often to be the creature of his external fortune,

fortune, moulded and formed by the incidents of his life?

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THE instance of Hazael's degeneracy leads us to reflect, in particular, on the dangers which arise from stations of power and greatness; especially when the elevation of men to these has been rapid and sudden. Few have the strength of mind which is requisite for bearing such a change with temperance and self-command. The respect which is paid to the great, and the scope which their condition affords for the indulgence of pleasure, are perilous circumstances to virtue. When men live among their equals, and are accustomed to encounter the hardships of life, they are of course reminded of their mutual dependence on each other, and of the dependence of all upon God. But when they are highly exalted above their fellows, they meet with few objects to awaken serious reflection, but with many to feed and inflame their passions. They are apt to separate their interest from that of all around them; to wrap themselves up in their vain grandeur;

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grandeur; and, in the lap of indolence and selfish pleasure, to acquire a cold indifference to the concerns even of those whom they call their friends. The fancied independence into which they are lifted up, is adverse to sentiments of piety, as well as of humanity, in their heart. *Taking the timbrel and the harp, and rejoicing at the sound of the organ, they say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? or what profit shall we have, if we pray unto him?*

But we are not to imagine, that elevated stations in the world furnish the only formidable trials to which our virtue is exposed. It will be found, that we are liable to no fewer nor less dangerous temptations, from the opposite extreme of poverty and depression. When men who have known better days are thrown down into abject situations of fortune, their spirits are broken and their temper soured. Envy rankles in their breast at such as are more successful. The providence of Heaven is accused in secret murmurs; and the sense of misery is ready to

to push them into atrocious crimes, in order to better their state. Among the inferiour classes of mankind, craft and dishonesty are too often found to prevail. Low and penurious circumstances depress the human powers. They deprive men of the proper means of knowledge and improvement; and where ignorance is gross, it is always in hazard of engendering profligacy.

Hence it has been, generally, the opinion of wise men in all ages, that there is a certain middle condition of life, equally remote from either of those extremes of fortune, which, though it want not also its own dangers, yet is, on the whole, the state most favourable both to virtue and to happiness. For there, luxury and pride on the one hand, have not opportunity to enervate or intoxicate the mind, nor want and dependence on the other, to sink and debase it; there, all the native affections of the soul have the freest and fairest exercise, the equality of men is felt, friendships are formed, and improvements of every sort are pursued with most success; there, men are prompted to industry, without being over-

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Prov. xxx.
8, 9.

come by toil, and their powers called forth into exertion, without being either superseded by too much abundance, or baffled by insuperable difficulties; there, a mixture of comforts and of wants, at once awakens their gratitude to God, and reminds them of their dependence on his aid; and, therefore, in this state, men seem to enjoy life to most advantage, and to be least exposed to the snares of vice. Such a condition is recorded in the book of Proverbs, to have been the wish and choice of one who was eminent for wisdom. *Remove far from me vanity and lies. Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with food convenient for me. Lest I be full, and deny Thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.*

FROM the whole view which we have now taken of the subject, we may, in the first place, learn the reasons for which a variety of conditions and ranks was established by Providence among mankind. This life is obviously intended to be a state of probation and trial. No trial of characters

ters is requisite with respect to God, who sees what is in every heart, and perfectly knows what part each man would act, in all the possible situations of fortune. But on account of men themselves, and of the world around them, it was necessary that trial should take place, and a discrimination of characters be made; in order that true virtue might be separated from false appearances of it, and the justice of Heaven be displayed in its final retributions; in order that the failings of men might be so discovered to themselves, as to afford them proper instruction, and promote their amendment; and in order that their characters might be shewn to the world in every point of view, which could furnish either examples for imitation, or admonitions of danger. The accomplishment of these important purposes required, that human life should not always proceed in one tenour; but that it should both be checquered with many revolutions, and diversified by a variety of employments and ranks; in passing through which, the touchstone might be applied to the characters of men, and

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their hidden virtues or vices explored. Hazael might have appeared in history with a degree of reputation to which he was not entitled, had he continued to act in a subordinate station. At bottom, he was false and unsound. When raised higher in life, the corruption of his heart discovered itself; and he is now held forth with deserved infamy, as a warning to succeeding ages.

IN the second place, We learn, from what has been said, the importance of attending, with the utmost care, to the choice which we make of our employment and condition in life. It has been shewn, that our external situation frequently operates powerfully on our moral character; and by consequence that it is strictly connected, not only with our temporal welfare, but with our everlasting happiness or misery. He who might have passed unblamed, and upright, through certain walks of life, by unhappily choosing a road where he meets with temptations too strong for his virtue, precipitates himself into shame here, and into endless ruin hereafter. Yet how often is the determination

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of this most important article left to the chance of accidental connexions, or submitted to the option of youthful fancy and humour? When it is made the subject of serious deliberation, how seldom have they, on whom the decision of it depends, any further view than so to dispose of one who is coming out into life, as that he may the soonest become rich, or, as it is expressed, make his way to most advantage in the world? Are there no other objects than this to be attended to, in fixing the plan of life? Are there no more sacred and important interests which deserve to be consulted?—You would not willingly place one whose welfare you studied, in a situation for which you were convinced that his abilities were unequal. These, therefore, you examine with care; and on them you rest the ground of your decision. Be persuaded that not abilities merely, but the turn of the temper, and the heart, require to be examined with equal attention, in forming the plan of future establishment. Every one has some peculiar weakness, some predominant passion, which exposes

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him to temptations of one kind more than of another. Early this may be discerned to shoot; and from its first rising its future growth may be inferred. Anticipate its progress. Consider how it is likely to be affected by succeeding occurrences in life. If you bring one whom you are rearing up into a situation where all the surrounding circumstances shall cherish and mature this fatal principle in his nature, you become, in a great measure, answerable for the consequences that follow. In vain you trust to his abilities and powers. Vice and corruption, when they have tainted the heart, are sufficient to upset the greatest abilities. Nay, too frequently they turn them against the possessor; and render them the instruments of his more speedy ruin.

IN the third place, We learn, from the history which has been illustrated, never to judge of true happiness, merely from the degree of men's advancement in the world. Always betrayed by appearances, the multitude are caught by nothing so much as by the
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the show and pomp of life. They think every one blest, who is raised far above others in rank. From their earliest years they are taught to fix their views upon worldly elevation, as the ultimate object of their aims; and of all the sources of error in conduct, this is the most general.—Hazael, on the throne of Syria, would, doubtless, be more envied, and esteemed by the multitude a far happier man, than when, yet a subject, he was employed by Benhadad to carry his message to Elisha. Yet, O Hazael! how much better had it been for thee never to have known the name or honour of a king, than to have purchased it at the expence of so much guilt; forfeiting thy first and best character; rushing into crimes which were once thine abhorrence; and becoming a traitor to the native sentiments and dictates of thy heart! How fatal to thy repose proved that coveted purple, which was drenched by thee in so much innocent blood! How much more cheerful were thy days, and how much calmer thy nights, in the former periods of thy life, than when, placed on a throne, thy ears were invaded

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by day with the cries of the miserable whom thou hadst ruined ; and thy slumbers broken by night with the shocking remembrance of thy cruelties and crimes !——Never let us judge by the outside of things ; nor conclude a man to be happy, solely because he is encompassed with wealth or grandeur. Much misery often lurks where it is little suspected by the world. The material inquiries respecting felicity are, not what a man's external condition is, but with what disposition of mind he bears it ; whether he be corrupted or improved by it ; whether he conducts himself so as to be acceptable to God, and approved of by good men. For these are the circumstances which make the real and important distinctions among the conditions of men. The effects of these are to last for ever, when all worldly distinctions shall be forgotten.

IN the fourth place, From all that has been said, we should learn never to be immoderately anxious about our external situation, but to submit our lot with cheerfulness to the disposal of Heaven. To make
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the best and most prudent arrangements which we can, respecting our condition in life, is matter of high duty. But let us remember that all the plans which we form are precarious and uncertain. After the utmost precautions taken by human wisdom, no man can foresee the hidden dangers which may await him in that path of life on which he has pitched. Providence chooses for us much more wisely than we can choose for ourselves; and, from circumstances that appeared at first most unpromising and adverse, often brings forth in the issue both temporal and spiritual felicity. *Who knoweth what is good for a man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow?* When we consider the darkness of our present state, the imbecility of human nature, and the doubtful and ambiguous value of all that we call prosperity, the exhortation of the Psalmist comes home with great force on every reflecting mind, *Commit thy way unto the Lord.* Form thy measures with prudence; but divest thyself of anxiety about the issue. Instead of seeking to order thine own lot,

Psalm
xxxvii. 5.

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acquiesce in the appointment of Heaven, and follow without hesitation the call of Providence, and of duty. In whatever situation of life God shall place thee, look up devoutly to Him for grace and assistance; and study to act the part assigned thee with a faithful and upright heart. Thus shalt thou have peace within thyself, while thy course is going on; and when it draws towards a close, with satisfaction thou shalt review thy conduct. For, after all the toils and labours of life, and all the vain struggles which we maintain for pre-eminence and distinction, we shall find at the conclusion of the whole scene, that *to fear God and keep his commandments is the whole duty of man.*

SERMON XIII.

On the BENEFITS to be derived from the
HOUSE OF MOURNING.

ECCLESIASTES, vii. 2, 3, 4.

*It is better to go to the house of mourning,
than to go to the house of feasting; for
that is the end of all men, and the living
will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better
than laughter; for by the sadness of the
countenance the heart is made better. The
heart of the wise is in the house of mourn-
ing; but the heart of fools is in the house
of mirth.*

MANY of the maxims contained in this
book of Ecclesiastes will appear strange
sayings to the men of the world. But
when they reflect on the character of him
who delivers them, they cannot but admit
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that his tenets deserve a serious and attentive examination. For, they are not the doctrines of a pedant, who, from an obscure retirement, declaims against pleasures which he never knew. They are not the invectives of a disappointed man, who takes revenge upon the world, by satirising those enjoyments which he sought in vain to obtain. They are the conclusions of a great and prosperous prince, who had once given full scope to his desires; who was thoroughly acquainted with life in its most flattering scenes; and who now, reviewing all that he had enjoyed, delivers to us the result of long experience, and tried wisdom. None of his principles seem, at first view, more dubious and exceptionable than those which the Text presents. To assert that sorrow is preferable to mirth, and the *house of mourning* to the *house of feasting*; to advise men to choose mortification and sadness, when it is in their power to indulge in joy, may appear harsh and unreasonable doctrines. They may, perhaps, be accounted enemies to the innocent enjoyment of life, who give countenance to so severe a system, and thereby

thereby increase the gloom which already sits sufficiently heavy on the condition of man. But let this censure be suspended, until we examine with care into the spirit and meaning of the sentiments here delivered.

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It is evident that the wise man does not prefer sorrow, upon its own account, to mirth; or represent sadness as a state more eligible than joy. He considers it in the light of discipline only. He views it with reference to an end. He compares it with certain improvements which he supposes it to produce; *when the heart is made better by the sadness of the countenance, and the living to lay to heart what is the end of all men.* Now, if great and lasting benefits are found to result from occasional sadness, these, sure, may be capable of giving it the preference to some fleeting sensations of joy. The means which he recommends in order to our obtaining those benefits, are to be explained according to the principles of sound reason; and to be understood with those limitations which the Eastern style, in delivering moral precepts, frequently requires.

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He bids us *go to the house of mourning* ; but he does not command us to dwell there. When he prefers sorrow to laughter, he is not to be understood as prohibiting all mirth ; as requiring us to wear a perpetual cloud on our brow, and to sequestrate ourselves from every cheerful entertainment of social life. Such an interpretation would be inconsistent with many other exhortations in his own writings, which recommend temperate and innocent joy. It would not suit with the proper discharge of the duties which belong to us as members of society ; and would be most opposite to the goodness and benignity of our Creator. The true scope of his doctrine in this passage is, that there is a certain temper and state of heart, which is of far greater consequence to real happiness, than the habitual indulgence of giddy and thoughtless mirth ; that for the attainment and cultivation of this temper, frequent returns of grave reflection are necessary ; that, upon this account, it is profitable to give admission to those views of human distress which tend to awaken such reflection in the mind ; and that thus, from the vicissitudes

vicissitudes of sorrow, which we either experience in our own lot, or sympathise with in the lot of others, much wisdom and improvement may be derived. These are the sentiments which I purpose at present to justify and recommend, as most suitable to the character of men and of Christians; and not in the least inconsistent with pleasure, rightly understood.

Among the variety of dispositions which are to be found in the world, some indeed require less of this discipline than others. There are persons whose tender and delicate sensibility, either derived from nature, or brought on by repeated afflictions, renders them too deeply susceptible of every mournful impression; whose spirits stand more in need of being supported and cheered, than of being saddened by the dark views of human life. In such cases we are commanded to *lift up the hands which hang down, and to confirm the feeble knees.* But this is far from being the common disposition of men. Their minds are in general inclined to levity, much more than to thoughtful melancholy; and their hearts more apt
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Isa. xxxv. 3.
Heb. xii. 12.

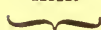
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to be contracted and hardened, than to relent with too much facility. I shall therefore endeavour to shew them, what bad inclinations their compliance with Solomon's advice would correct; what good dispositions, with respect to God, their neighbours, and themselves, it would improve; and how, upon the whole, his doctrine is verified, that *by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.*

I BEGIN by observing, that the temper recommended in the Text suits the present constitution of things in this world. Had man been destined for a course of undisturbed enjoyment, perpetual gaiety would then have corresponded to his state; and pensive thought have been an unnatural intrusion. But in a state where all is checquered and mixed, where there is no prosperity without a reverse, and no joy without its attending griefs, where from the house of feasting all must, at one time or other, pass into the house of mourning, it would be equally unnatural if no admission were given to grave reflection. The mind
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of man must be attempered to his condition! Providence, whose wisdom is conspicuous in all its works, has adjusted with exact proportion the inward powers to the outward state of every rational being. It has for this purpose implanted the serious and sympathetic feelings in our nature, that they might correspond with the vicissitudes of sorrow in our lot. He who endeavours to repel their influence, or to stifle them in unseasonable mirth, acts a violent and unnatural part. He strives with vain effort against the current of things, contradicts the intentions of his Maker, and counteracts the original impulses of his own heart.

It is proper also to observe, that as *the sadness of the countenance* has, in our present situation, a proper and natural place; so it is requisite to the true enjoyment of pleasure. Worldly and sensual men often remark, not till it be too late, that, by the studied efforts of constant repetition, all their pleasures fail. They draw them off so close to the dregs, that they become insipid and nauseous. Hence even *in laughter their heart is sorrowful, and the end of their*

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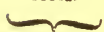
their mirth is heaviness. It is only the interposal of serious and thoughtful hours, that can give any lively sensations to the returns of joy. I speak not of those thoughtful hours, too well known to sinners, which proceed from guilty remorse; and which, instead of preparing for future pleasure, damp and sicken the moment of enjoyment: but of those which take rise from the mind retreating into itself, and opening to the sentiments of religion and humanity. Such hours of virtuous sadness brighten the gleams of succeeding joy. They give, to the temperate enjoyments of the pious and humane, a refined and delicate relish, to which the hardened and insensible are entire strangers. For it will be found, that in proportion as the tender affections of the soul are kept awake, how much soever they may sometimes distress the heart, they preserve it open likewise to the most agreeable sensations. He who never knew the sorrows of friendship, never also knew its joys. He whose heart cannot relent in the house of mourning, will, in the most social hour of the house of feasting, partake of no more than

than the lowest part of animal pleasure.

—Having premised these observations, I proceed to point out the direct effects of a proper attention to the distresses of life upon our moral and religious character.

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IN the first place, The house of mourning is calculated to give a proper check to our natural thoughtlessness and levity. The indolence of mankind, and their love of pleasure, spread through all characters and ranks some degree of aversion to what is grave and serious. They grasp at any object, either of business or amusement, which makes the present moment pass smoothly away; which carries their thoughts abroad, and saves them from the trouble of reflecting on themselves. With too many this passes into a habit of constant dissipation. If their fortune and rank allow them to indulge their inclinations, they devote themselves to the pursuit of amusement through all its different forms. The skilful arrangement of its successive scenes, and the preparatory study for shining in each, are the only exertions on which their under-

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standing is employed. Such a mode of life may keep alive, for a while, a frivolous vivacity. It may improve men in some of those exterior accomplishments, which sparkle in the eyes of the giddy and the vain; but it must sink them in the esteem of all the wise. It renders them strangers to themselves; and useless, if not pernicious, to the world. They lose every manly principle. Their minds become relaxed and effeminate. All that is great or respectable in the human character, is buried under a mass of trifles and follies.

If some measures ought to be taken for rescuing the mind from this disgraceful levity; if some principles must be acquired, which may give more dignity and steadiness to conduct; where, I pray you, are these to be looked for? Not surely in the house of feasting, where every object flatters the senses, and strengthens the seductions to which we are already prone; where the spirit of dissipation circulates from heart to heart; and the children of folly mutually admire and are admired. It is in the sober and serious house of mourning that the tide
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of vanity is made to turn, and a new direction given to the current of thought. When some affecting incident presents a strong discovery of the deceitfulness of all worldly joy, and rouses our sensibility to human woe; when we behold those with whom we had lately mingled in the house of feasting, sunk by some of the sudden vicissitudes of life into the vale of misery; or when, in sad silence, we stand by the friend whom we had loved as our own soul, stretched on the bed of death; then is the season when the world begins to appear in a new light; when the heart opens to virtuous sentiments, and is led into that train of reflection which ought to direct life. He who before knew not what it was to commune with his heart on any serious subject, now puts the question to himself, For what purpose he was sent forth into this mortal, transitory state; what his fate is likely to be when it concludes; and what judgment he ought to form of those pleasures which amuse for a little, but which, he now sees, cannot save the heart from anguish in the evil day? Touched by the hand of thought-

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ful melancholy, that airy edifice of bliss, which fancy had raised up for him, vanishes away. He beholds, in the place of it, the lonely and barren desert, in which, surrounded with many a disagreeable object, he is left musing upon himself. The time which he has mis-spent, and the faculties which he has misemployed, his foolish levity, and his criminal pursuits, all rise in painful prospect before him. That unknown state of existence into which, race after race, the children of men pass, strikes his mind with solemn awe.—Is there no course by which he can retrieve his past errors? Is there no superiour power to which he can look up for aid? Is there no plan of conduct, which, if it exempt him not from sorrow, can at least procure him consolation amidst the distressful exigencies of life?—Such meditations as these, suggested by the house of mourning, frequently produce a change on the whole character. They revive those sparks of goodness which were nigh being quite extinguished in the dissipated mind; and give rise to principles and conduct more rational
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in themselves, and more suitable to the human state.

IN the second place, Impressions of this nature not only produce moral seriousness, but awaken sentiments of piety, and bring men into the sanctuary of religion. One might, indeed, imagine that the blessings of a prosperous condition would prove the most natural incitements to devotion; and that when men were happy in themselves, and saw nothing but happiness around them, they could not fail gratefully to acknowledge that God who *giveth them all things richly to enjoy*. Yet such is their corruption, that they are never more ready to forget their benefactor, than when loaded with his benefits. The giver is concealed from their careless and inattentive view, by the cloud of his own gifts. When their life continues to flow in one smooth current, unruffled by any griefs; when they neither receive in their own circumstances, nor allow themselves to receive from the circumstances of others, any admonitions of human instability; they not only become

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regardless of Providence, but are in hazard of contemning it. Glorifying in their strength, and lifted up by the pride of life into supposed independence, that impious sentiment, if not uttered by the mouth, yet too often lurks in the hearts of many, during their flourishing periods, *What is the Almighty, that we should serve him ; and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?*

If such be the tendency of the house of feasting, how necessary is it, that, by some change in their situation, men should be obliged to enter into the house of mourning, in order to recover a proper sense of their dependent state? It is there, when forsaken by the gaieties of the world, and left alone with God, that we are made to perceive how awful his government is; how easily human greatness bends before him; and how quickly all our designs and measures, at his interposal, vanish into nothing. There, when the countenance is sad, and the affections are softened by grief; when we sit apart, involved in serious thought, looking down as from some eminence on those dark clouds that hang
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over the life of man, the arrogance of prosperity is humbled, and the heart melts under the impressions of religion. Formerly we were taught, but now we see, we feel, how much we stand in need of an Almighty Protector, amidst the changes of this vain world. Our soul cleaves to Him who *despises not, nor abhors the affliction of the afflicted*. Prayer flows forth of its own accord from the relenting heart, that he may be our God, and the God of our friends in distress; that he may never forsake us while we are sojourning in this land of pilgrimage; may strengthen us under its calamities; and bring us hereafter to those habitations of rest, where we, and they whom we love, may be delivered from the trials which all are now doomed to endure. The discoveries of his mercy, which he has made in the Gospel of Christ, are viewed with joy, as so many rays of light sent down from above to dispel, in some degree, the surrounding gloom. A Mediator and Intercessor with the Sovereign of the universe, appear comfortable names; and the resurrection of the just becomes the power-

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ful cordial of grief. In such moments as these, which we may justly call happy moments, the soul participates of all the pleasures of devotion. It feels the power of religion to support and relieve. It is softened, without being broken. It is full, and it pours itself forth; pours itself forth, if we may be allowed to use the expression, into the bosom of its merciful Creator.

IN the third place, Such serious sentiments produce the happiest effect upon our disposition towards our fellow-creatures, as well as towards God. It is a common and just observation, that they who have lived always in affluence and ease, strangers to the miseries of life, are liable to contract hardness of heart with respect to all the concerns of others. Wrapped up in themselves, and their own pleasures, they behold with indifference the most affecting scenes of distress. Habituated to indulge all their desires without control, they become impatient of the least provocation or offence; and are ready to trample on their inferiours, as if they were creatures of a different

different species from themselves. Is this an amiable temper, or such as becomes a man? When appearing in others, do we not view it with much displeasure? When imputed to ourselves, can we avoid accounting it a severe reproach?

By the experience of distress, this arrogant insensibility of temper is most effectually corrected; as the remembrance of our own sufferings naturally prompts us to feel for others when they suffer. But if Providence has been so kind as not to subject us to much of this discipline in our own lot, let us draw improvement from the harder lot of others. Let us sometimes step aside from the smooth and flowery paths in which we are permitted to walk, in order to view the toilsome march of our fellows through the thorny desert. By voluntarily going into the house of mourning; by yielding to the sentiments which it excites, and mingling our tears with those of the afflicted, we shall acquire that humane sensibility which is one of the highest ornaments of the nature of man. Perceiving how much the common distresses of life
place

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place us all on a level, and render the high and the low, the rich and the poor, companions in misfortune and mortality, we shall learn to set no man at nought, and, least of any, our afflicted brother. Prejudices will be extinguished, and benevolence opened and enlarged, when looking around on the multitude of men, we consider them as a band of fellow-travellers in the valley of woe, where it ought to be the office of every one to alleviate, as much as possible, the common burden.—While the vain and the licentious are revelling in the midst of extravagance and riot, how little do they think of those scenes of sore distress which are going on at that moment throughout the world; multitudes struggling for a poor subsistence to support the wife and the children whom they love, and who look up to them with eager eyes for that bread which they can hardly procure; multitudes groaning under sickness in desolate cottages, untended and unmourned; many, apparently in a better situation of life, pining away in secret with concealed griefs; families weeping over the beloved friends

friends whom they have lost, or, in all the bitterness of anguish, bidding those who are just expiring the last adieu.

May we not appeal to the heart of every good man, nay almost to the heart of every man who has not divested himself of his natural feelings, whether the admission of such views of human life might not, sometimes at least, furnish a more worthy employment to the mind, than that *mirth of fools*, which Solomon compares to *the crackling of thorns under a pot*; the transient burst of unmeaning joy; the empty explosion of giddiness and levity? Those sallies of jollity in the house of feasting are often forced from a troubled mind; like flashes from the black cloud, which, after a momentary effulgence, are succeeded by thicker darkness. Whereas compassionate affections, even at the time when they draw tears from our eyes for human misery, convey satisfaction to the heart. The gracious appointment of Heaven has ordained that sympathetic pains should always be accompanied with a certain degree of pleasure; on purpose that we

might

Eccles. vii. 6.

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might be more interested in the case of the distressed, and that, by this mysterious bond, man might be linked closer to man. The inward satisfaction which belongs to the compassionate affections is, at the same time, heightened by the approbation which they receive from our reason; and by the consciousness which they afford us of feeling what men and Christians ought to feel.

IN the fourth place, The disposition recommended in the Text, not only improves us in piety and humanity, but likewise assists us in self-government, and the due moderation of our desires. The house of mourning is the school of temperance and sobriety. Every wise man will find it for his interest to enter into it sometimes of his own accord, lest otherwise he be compelled to take up his dwelling there. Seasonable interruptions of our pleasures are necessary to their prolongation. For, continued scenes of luxury and indulgence hasten to a melancholy issue. The house of feasting too often becomes an avenue to the house of mourning. Short, to the licentious, is the
interval

interval between them; and speedy the transition from the one to the other.

But supposing that, by prudent management, the men of pleasure could avoid the pernicious effects which intemperance and dissoluteness are likely to produce on their health or their fortune, can they also prevent those disorders which such habits will introduce into their minds? Can they escape that wrath of the Almighty, which will infallibly pursue them for their sins both here and hereafter? For whence, so much as from the unchecked pursuit of pleasure, do all those crimes arise which stain the characters of men with the deepest guilt, and expose them to the severest judgments of Heaven? Whence, then, is the corrective of those mischiefs to be sought, but from such discipline as shall moderate that intemperate admiration of the world which gave rise to the evil? By repairing sometimes to the house of mourning, you would chasten the looseness of fancy, abate the eagerness of passion, and afford scope to reason for exerting her restraining powers. You would behold this world stripped of
its

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its false colours, and reduced to its proper level. Many an important instruction you would receive from the humiliation of the proud, the mortification of the vain, and the sufferings of the voluptuous, which you would see exemplified before you, in the chambers of sorrow, of sickness, and of death. You would then be taught *to rejoice as though you rejoiced not, and to weep as though you weeped not*; that is, neither in joy, nor in grief, to run to excess; but *to use this world so as not to abuse it; contemplating the fashion thereof as passing away.*

Moreover, you would there learn the important lesson of suiting your mind, beforehand, to what you had reason to expect from the world; a lesson too seldom studied by mankind, and to the neglect of which, much of their misery, and much of their guilt, is to be charged. By turning away their eyes from the dark side of life, by looking at the world only in one light, and that a flattering one, they form their measures on a false plan, and are necessarily deceived and betrayed. Hence, the
vexation

vexation of succeeding disappointment and blasted hope. Hence, their criminal impatience of life, and their bitter accusations of God and man; when, in truth, they have reason to accuse only their own folly.—

Thou who wouldst act like a wise man, and build thy house on the rock, and not on the sand, contemplate human life not only in the sunshine, but in the shade. Frequent the house of mourning, as well as the house of mirth. Study the nature of that state in which thou art placed; and balance its joys with its sorrows. Thou seest that the cup which is held forth to the whole human race, is mixed. Of its bitter ingredients, expect that thou art to drink thy portion. Thou seest the storm hovering every where in the clouds around thee. Be not surprised if on thy head it shall break. Lower, therefore, thy sails. Dismiss thy florid hopes; and come forth prepared either to act or to suffer, according as Heaven shall decree. Thus shalt thou be excited to take the properest measures for defence, by endeavouring to secure an interest in his favour, who, *in the*
time

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time of trouble, can hide thee in his pavilion.

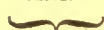
Thy mind shall adjust itself to follow the order of his Providence. Thou shalt be enabled, with equanimity and steadiness, to hold thy course through life.

IN the fifth place, By accustoming ourselves to such serious views of life, our excessive fondness for life itself will be moderated, and our minds gradually formed to wish and to long for a better world. If we know that our continuance here is to be short, and that we are intended by our Maker for a more lasting state, and for employments of a nature altogether different from those which now occupy the busy, or amuse the vain, we must surely be convinced that it is of the highest consequence to prepare ourselves for so important a change. This view of our duty is frequently held up to us in the sacred writings; and hence religion becomes, though not a morose, yet a grave and solemn principle, calling off the attention of men from light pursuits to those which are of eternal moment. *What is a man profited*

profited if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? if he shall lead a life of thoughtless mirth on earth, and exclude himself from eternal felicity in heaven? Worldly affection and sensual pleasure depress all our higher powers. They form an unnatural union between the human soul and this earth, which was only designed for its temporary abode. They attach it too strongly to objects from which it must shortly part. They alienate its desires from God and Heaven, and deject it with slavish and unmanly fears of death. Whereas, by the discipline of religious seriousness, it is gradually loosened from the fetters of sense. Assisted to discover the vanity of this world, it rises above it; and, in the hours of sober thought, cultivates connexion with those divine and immortal objects, among which it is designed to dwell.

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ENOUGH has now been said to convince any thinking person of the justice and reasonableness of the maxims in the Text; and to show, that, on various occasions,

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sorrow may be better than laughter.

Wouldst thou acquire the habit of recollection, and fix the principles of thy conduct; wouldst thou be led up to thy Creator and Redeemer, and be formed to sentiments of piety and devotion; wouldst thou be acquainted with those mild and tender affections which delight the compassionate and humane; wouldst thou have the power of sensual appetites tamed and corrected, and thy soul raised above the ignoble love of life, and fear of death? Go, my brother, go—not to scenes of pleasure and riot, not to the house of feasting and mirth—but to the silent house of mourning; and adventure to dwell for a while among objects that will soften thy heart. Contemplate the lifeless remains of what once was fair and flourishing. Bring home to thyself the vicissitudes of life. Recal the remembrance of the friend, the parent, or the child, whom thou tenderly lovedst. Look back on the days of former years; and think on the companions of thy youth, who now sleep in the dust. Let the vanity, the mutability, and the sorrows

sorrows of the human estate, rise in full prospect before thee; and though *thy countenance* may be *made sad*, *thy heart shall be made better*. This sadness, though for the present it dejects, yet shall in the end fortify thy spirit; inspiring thee with such sentiments, and prompting such resolutions, as shall enable thee to enjoy, with more real advantage, the rest of life. Dispositions of this nature form one part of the character of those *mourners* whom our Saviour hath pronounced *blessed*; and of those to whom it is promised, that *sowing in tears, they shall reap in joy*. A great difference there is between being serious and melancholy; and a melancholy too there is of that kind which deserves to be sometimes indulged.

Matt. v. 4.

Pfalm
cxxxvi. 5.

Religion hath, on the whole, provided for every good man abundant materials of consolation and relief. How dark soever the present face of nature may appear, it dispels the darkness, when it brings into view the entire system of things, and extends our survey to the whole kingdom

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of God. It represents what we now behold as only a part, and a small part, of the general order. It assures us, that though here, for wise ends, misery and sorrow are permitted to have place, these temporary evils shall, in the end, advance the happiness of all who love God, and are faithful to their duty. It shows them this mixed and confused scene vanishing by degrees away, and preparing the introduction of that state, where the house of mourning shall be shut up for ever; where no tears are seen, and no groans heard; where no hopes are frustrated, and no virtuous connexions dissolved; but where, under the light of the Divine countenance, goodness shall flourish in perpetual felicity. Thus, though religion may occasionally chasten our mirth with sadness of countenance, yet under that sadness it allows not the heart of good men to sink; it calls upon them to rejoice, *because the Lord reigneth, who is their Rock, and the most high God, who is their Redeemer.* Reason likewise joins her voice with that of Religion; forbidding us to
make

make peevish and unreasonable complaints of human life, or injuriously to ascribe to it more evil than it contains. Mixed as the present state is, she pronounces, that generally, if not always, there is more happiness than misery, more pleasure than pain, in the condition of man.

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On the Divine GOVERNMENT of the
PASSIONS of MEN.

PSALM lxxvi. 10.

*Surely the wrath of man shall praise
thee; the remainder of wrath shalt
thou restrain.*

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THIS Psalm appears to have been composed on occasion of some remarkable deliverance obtained by the Jewish nation. It is generally understood to have been written in the reign of Hezekiah, and to refer to the formidable invasion of Judea by Sennacherib; when the angel of the Lord, in one night, discomfited the whole Assyrian host, and smote them with sudden destruction. To this interposition of the Divine arm, those expressions in the
context

context may naturally be applied ; *There brake he the arrows of the bow, the shield, the sword, and the battle. The stout-hearted are spoiled ; they have slept their sleep ; and none of the men of might have found their hands. At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob ! both the chariot and the horse are cast into a dead sleep.* In the Text we have the wise and religious reflection of the Psalmist upon the violent designs which had been carried on by the enemies of his country, and upon the issue to which Providence had brought them. *Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee. By the wrath of man,* we are to understand all that the impetuosity of human passions can devise or execute ; the projects of ambition and resentment, the rage of persecution, the fury of war ; the disorders which violence produces in private life, and the public commotions which it excites in the world. All these shall *praise God*, not with their intention and design, nor by their native tendency ; but by those wise and good purposes, which his providence makes them accomplish ;

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from their poison extracting health, and converting things, which in themselves are pernicious, into instruments of his glory, and of public benefit: So that, though *the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God*, it is nevertheless forced and compelled to minister to his praise. The Psalmist adds, *the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain*; that is, God will allow scope to the wrath of man as far as it answers his good purposes, and is subservient to his praise; the rest of it shall be curbed and bound up. When it would attempt to go beyond its prescribed limit, he says to it, as to the waters of the ocean, *Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.*

All this shall be fully verified and declared by the last issue of things; when we shall be able more clearly to trace the Divine administration through its several steps, by seeing the consummation of the whole. In some cases, it may be reserved for this period to unfold the mysterious wisdom of Heaven. But in general, as much of the Divine conduct is at present manifest,

manifest, as gives just ground for the assertion in the Text. In the sequel of this Discourse I shall endeavour to illustrate and confirm it. I shall show in what manner the wrath of man is made to praise the power, the wisdom, the justice, and the goodness of God.

I BEGIN with this observation, That in order to accomplish the great purposes carried on by the Government of the Universe, it is necessary that the Divine perfections be displayed before mankind in a sensible and striking manner. We are not to conceive the Supreme Being as hereby seeking praise to himself, from a principle of ostentation or vain-glory. Independent and self-sufficient, he rests in the enjoyment of his own beatitude. His praise consists in the general order and welfare of his creation. This end cannot be attained, unless mankind be made to feel the subjection under which they are placed. They must be taught to admire and adore their Sovereign. They must be overawed by the view of a high
hand,

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hand, which can at pleasure control their actions, and render them subservient to purposes which they neither foresaw nor intended. Hence the propriety of God's making *the wrath of man to praise him*. We easily conceive in what manner the heavens and the earth are said to praise God, as they are standing monuments of that supreme perfection which is displayed in their creation. The virtues of good men obviously praise him, by exhibiting his image, and reflecting back his glory. But when even the vices and inordinate passions of bad men are made to praise him, in consequence of the useful purposes which they are compelled to accomplish, this, in a particular manner, distinguishes and signalizes a Divine hand; this opens a more wonderful prospect of the administration of Heaven, than if all its subjects had been loyal and willingly obedient, and the course of human affairs had proceeded in a quiet and regular tenour.

I. *THE wrath of man* redounds to the praise of Divine power. It brings it forth,
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with full and awful lustre, to the view of mankind. To reign with sovereign command amidst the most turbulent and disordered state of things, both in the natural and moral world, is the peculiar glory of Omnipotence. Hence God is described in Scripture as *sitting on the flood, riding on the wings of the wind, dwelling in the darkness and the tempest*; that is, making the most violent powers in the universe minister to his will; giving them scope or restraining them, according as suits the purposes of his dominion. As *he stills*, at his pleasure, the *raging of the seas, and the noise of their waves*, in like manner *he stills the tumults of the people*. When the passions of men are most inflamed, and their designs just ripe for bursting into execution; often, by some unexpected interposition, he calls upon the world to observe that there is One higher than the highest on earth, who can frustrate their devices in a moment, and command *the earth to be still before him*. Proud fleets, destined to carry destruction to neighbouring kingdoms, may cover the ocean. He

blows

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blows with his wind, and they are scattered. Mighty armies may go forth to the field in all the glory of human strength ; but the issues of battle are with Him. He suspends on high the invisible balance which weighs the fate of nations. According as the scale inclines, he gives to some slight event the power of deciding the contest. He clouds the sky with darkness, or opens the windows of heaven to let forth their flood. He dejects the hearts of the brave with sudden terror, and renders the hands of the strong, weak and unperforming at the critical moment. A thousand unseen ministers stand ready to be the instruments of his power, in humbling the pride, and checking the efforts of the wrath of man. Thus, in the instance of haughty Sennacherib, and that boasted tempest of wrath which he threatened to pour upon all the Jewish nation ; *I will put my hook, says the Almighty, in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest.* In that night the destroying angel smote the host, and he *departed with shame*

2 Kings,
xix. 28.

shame of face to his own land. When the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing; when the kings of the earth set themselves, and its rulers take counsel together, He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision.

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Psalm ii. 1,
2. 4.

II. THE *wrath of man* is made to praise the wisdom as well as the power of God. Nothing displays more remarkably the admirable counsel of Heaven, than its arranging the train of events in such a manner, that the unruly passions of the wicked shall contribute to overthrow their own designs. History abounds with examples of their being rendered the unconscious ministers of Providence, to accomplish purposes directly opposite to those which they had in view. Thus the cruelty of the sons of Jacob, in pursuing the destruction of their brother Joseph, became the means of effecting his high advancement. Thus the wrath of Pharaoh against the Israelites, and his unjust attempts to detain them in bondage, proved the occasion of bringing them forth from the land of slavery,

slavery, with signal marks of the favour of Heaven. Thus the inhuman plan which Haman had formed for ruining Mordecai, and extirpating the whole Jewish nation, paved the way for Mordecai's high promotion, and for the triumph of the Jews over all their enemies.

After this manner the Almighty *snareth the wicked in the works of their hands*; and erects his own council upon the ruin of theirs. Those events which, viewed apart, appear as spots in the Divine administration, when considered in connexion with all their consequences, are often found to give it additional lustre. The beauty and magnificence of the universe are much heightened by its being an extensive and complicated system; in which a variety of springs are made to play, and a multitude of different movements are, with most admirable art, regulated and kept in order. Interfering interests, and jarring passions, are in such manner balanced against one another; such proper checks are placed on the violence of human pursuits; and the *wrath of man* is made

made so to hold his course, that how opposite soever the several motions seem to be, yet they concur and meet at last in one direction. While, among the multitudes that dwell on the face of the earth, some are submissive to the Divine authority; some rise up in rebellion against it; others, absorbed in their pleasures and pursuits, are totally inattentive to it; they are all so moved by an imperceptible influence from above, that the zeal of the dutiful, the wrath of the rebellious, and the indifference of the careless, contribute finally to the glory of God. All are governed in such a way as suits their powers, and is consistent with rational freedom; yet all are subjected to the necessity of fulfilling the eternal purposes of Heaven. 'This depth of Divine wisdom in the administration of the universe, exceeds all human comprehension, and affords everlasting subject of adoration and praise.

III. *THE wrath of man* praises the justice of God, by being employed as the instrument of inflicting punishment on sinners.

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ners. Did bad men trace the course of events in their life with attentive eye, they might easily discover the greatest part of the disasters which they suffer, to be brought upon them by their own ungoverned passions. The succession of causes and effects is so contrived by Providence, that the wrath which they meant to pour forth on others, frequently recoils, by its effects, upon themselves. But supposing them to escape those external mischiefs which violent passions naturally occasion, they cannot evade the internal misery which they produce. The constitution of things is framed with such profound wisdom, that the Divine laws, in every event, execute themselves against the sinner, and carry their sanction in their own bosom. The Supreme Being has no occasion to unlock the prisons of the deep, or to call down the thunder from Heaven, in order to punish the *wrath of man*. He carries on the administration of justice with more simplicity and dignity. It is sufficient that he allow those fierce passions which render bad men the disturbers of others,

to

to operate on their own hearts. He delivers them up to themselves, and they become their own tormentors. Before the world, they may disguise their sufferings; but it is well known, that to be inwardly torn with despite, revenge, and wrathful passions, is the most intense of all misery. In thus connecting the punishment with the crime, making their *own wickedness to reprove them, and their backslidings to correct them*, the avenging hand of a righteous Governour is conspicuous; and thus the observation of the Psalmist is fully verified; *the wicked have drawn out the sword, and bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy; but their sword shall enter into their own heart.*

Psalm
xxxvii.
14, 15.

The *wrath of man* also praises the justice of God in the punishment of other criminals, as well as of the wrathful themselves. Ambitious and lawless men are let loose upon each other, that, without any supernatural interposition, they may fulfil the just vengeance of Heaven in their mutual destruction. They may occasionally be cemented together

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by conspiracy against the just; but as no firm nor lasting bond can unite them, they become at last the prey of mutual jealousy, strife, and fraud. For a time, they may go on, and seem to prosper. The justice of Heaven may appear to slumber; but it is awake, and only waits till the measure of their iniquity be full. God represents himself in Scripture as sometimes permitting wickedness to arise to an overgrown height, on purpose that its ruin may be the greater, and more exemplary. He says to the tyrant of Egypt, that *for this cause he had raised him up, that is, had allowed him to prosper and be exalted, that he might shew in him his power; and that his name might be declared throughout all the earth.* The Divine administration is glorified in the punishment contrived for the workers of iniquity, as well as in the reward prepared for the righteous. *This is the purpose which the Lord hath purposed upon all the earth; and this is the hand that is stretched forth over all the nations.*

Exod. ix. 16.

Isa. xiv. 26.

IV. *THE wrath of man* is made to praise the goodness of God. This is the most unexpected of its effects; and therefore requires to be the most fully illustrated. All the operations of the government of the Deity may be ultimately resolved into goodness. His power, and wisdom, and justice, all conduce to general happiness and order. Among the means which he uses for accomplishing this end, it will be found, that the wrath of man, through his over-ruling direction, possesses a considerable place.

FIRST, It is employed by God as an useful instrument of discipline and correction to the virtuous. The storms which ambition and pride raise among mankind, he permits with the same intention that he sends forth tempests among the elements; to clear the atmosphere of noxious vapours, and to purify it from that corruption which all things contract by too much rest. When wicked men prevail in their designs, and exercise the power which they have gained with a heavy and oppressive

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hand, the virtuous are apt to exclaim, in bitterness of soul, Where is the Lord? and where the sceptre of righteousness and truth? *Hath God forgotten to be gracious?* or doth he indeed see, and *is there knowledge in the Most High?*—Their oppressors are, in truth, no more than the ministers of God to them for good. He sees that they stand in need of correction, and therefore raises up enemies against them, in order to cure the intemperance of prosperity; and to produce, in the serious hours of affliction, proper reflections upon their duty, and their past errors.

In this light the disturbers of the earth are often represented in Scripture, as scourges in the hand of God, employed to inflict chastisement upon a degenerating people. They are commissioned for the execution of righteous and wise purposes, concealed from themselves; and when their commission is fulfilled, they are recalled and destroyed. Of this we have a remarkable example in the use which God made of the king of Assyria with respect to the people of Israel; *I will send him against*

against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey. Howbeit, he meaneth not so ; neither doth his heart think so ; but it is in his heart to destroy, and cut off nations not a few. Wherefore it shall come to pass, that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. In vain, then, doth the wrath of man lift itself up against God. He saith, by the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent. Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith ? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it ? All things, whether they will it or not, must work together for good to them that love God. The wrath of man, among the rest, fills up the place assigned to it by the ordination of Heaven. The violent enemy, the proud conquerour, and the oppressive tyrant, possess only the same station with the famine, the pestilence, and

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the flood. Their triumphs are no more than the accomplishment of God's correction; *and the remainder of their wrath shall he restrain.*

SECONDLY, God makes the *wrath of man* contribute to the benefit of the virtuous, by rendering it the means of improving and signalizing their graces; and of raising them, thereby, to higher honour and glory. Had human affairs proceeded in an orderly train, and no opposition been made to religion and virtue by the violence of the wicked, what room would have been left for some of the highest and most generous exertions of the soul of man? How many shining examples of fortitude, constancy, and patience, would have been lost to the world? What a field of virtues peculiar to a state of discipline had lain uncultivated? Spirits of a higher order possess a state of established virtue, that stands in need of no such trials and improvements. But to us, who are only under education for such a state, it belongs to pass through the furnace,
that

that our souls may be tried, refined, and brightened. We must stand the conflict, that we may be graced and crowned as conquerours. The *wrath of man* opens the field to glory; calls us forth to the most distinguished exercise of active virtue, and forms us to all those suffering graces which are among the highest ornaments of the human soul. It is thus, that the illustrious band of true patriots and heroes, of confessors and martyrs, have been set forth to the admiration of all ages, as *lights of the world*; while the rage and fury of enemies, instead of bearing them down, have only served to exalt and dignify them more.

THIRDLY, The *wrath of man* is often made to advance the temporal prosperity of the righteous. The occasional distresses which it brings upon them, frequently lay the foundation of their future success. The violence with which wicked men pursue their resentment, defeats its own purpose; and engages the world on the side of the virtuous, whom they persecute.

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The attempts of malice to blacken and defame them, bring forth their characters with more advantage to the view of impartial beholders. The extremities to which they are reduced by injustice and oppression, rouse their courage and activity; and often give occasion to such vigorous efforts in their just defence, as overcome all opposition, and terminate in prosperity and success. Even in cases where the *wrath of man* appears to prevail over the peaceable and the just, it is frequently, in its issue, converted into a blessing. How many have had reason to be thankful, for being disappointed by their enemies in designs which they earnestly pursued, but which, if successfully accomplished, they have afterwards seen would have occasioned their ruin? *Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even he shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.*

Psaln
cvii. 43.

While the *wrath of man* thus praises God by the advantages which it is made to bring to good men as individuals, the Divine hand is equally apparent in the similar

similar effects which it is appointed to produce to nations and societies. When wars and commotions shake the earth, when factions rage, and intestine divisions embroil kingdoms that before were flourishing, Providence seems, at first view, to have abandoned public affairs to the misrule of human passions. Yet from the midst of this confusion, order is often made to spring; and from these mischiefs lasting advantages to arise. By such convulsions, nations are roused from that dangerous lethargy into which flowing wealth, long peace, and growing effeminacy of manners, had sunk them. They are awakened to discern their true interests; and taught to take proper measures for security and defence against all their foes. Inveterate prejudices are corrected; and latent sources of danger are discovered. Public spirit is called forth; and larger views of national happiness are formed. The corruptions to which every government is liable, are often rectified by a ferment in the political body, as noxious humours in the animal frame are carried off by the shock

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shock of a disease. Attempts made against a wise and well-established civil constitution tend in the issue to strengthen it; and the disorders of licentiousness and faction, teach men more highly to prize the blessings of tranquillity and legal protection.

FOURTHLY, *The wrath of man*, when it breaks forth in the persecution of religion, praises the Divine goodness, by being rendered conducive to the advancement of truth, and propagation of religion in the world. The church of God, since the days of its infancy, hath never been entirely exempted from the wrath of the world; and in those ages, during which it was most exposed to that wrath, it hath always flourished the most. In vain the policy and the rage of men united their efforts to extinguish this Divine light. Though all the four winds blew against it, it only shone brighter, and flamed higher. *Many waters could not quench it, nor all the floods drown it.* The constancy and fortitude of those who suffered for the truth,

truth, had a much greater effect in increasing the number of converts, than all the terroure and cruelty of persecutors in diminishing it. By this means the *wrath of man* was made to turn against itself, to the destruction of its own purpose; like waves, which, assaulting a rock with impotent fury, discover its immoveable stability, while they dash themselves in pieces at its feet.

I SHALL only add one other instance of the *wrath of man* praising God, by accomplishing ends of most extensive benefit to mankind. Never did the rage and malice of the wicked imagine that they had obtained a more complete triumph, than in the death of Jesus Christ. When they had executed their purpose of making him suffer as a malefactor, they were confident that they had extinguished his name, and discomfited his followers for ever. Behold, how feeble are the efforts of the *wrath of man* against the decree of Heaven! All that they intended to overthrow, they most effectually established.

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The death of Christ was, in the councils of Heaven, the spring of everlasting life to the faithful. The cross on which he suffered with apparent ignominy, became the standard of eternal honour to him; the ensign under which his followers assembled, and triumphed. He who, at his pleasure, *restrains the remainder of wrath*, suffered the rage of our Saviour's enemies to suggest no other things to them than what, long before, he had determined, and his prophets had foretold. They all conspired to render the whole scene of Christ's sufferings exactly conformable to the original predicted plan of Divine mercy and goodness; and each of them contributed his share to accomplish that great undertaking, which none of them in the least understood, or meant to promote.—So remarkable an instance as this, fully ascertained in Scripture, of the *wrath of man* ministering to the designs of Heaven, ought to be frequently in our eye; as an exemplification of the conduct of Providence in many other cases, where we have not so much light afforded us for tracing its ways.

By

By this induction of particulars, the doctrine contained in the Text is plainly and fully verified. We have seen, that the disorders which the pride and passions of men occasion in the world, though they take rise from the corruption of human nature in this fallen state, yet are so overruled by Providence, as to redound to his honour and glory who governs all. They illustrate before the world the Divine perfections in the administration of the universe. They serve the purposes of moral and religious improvement to the souls of men. By a secret tendency, they advance the welfare of those whom they appear to threaten with evil. *Surely, O God! the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.*—In thy hand it is; and Thou never lettest it forth but in weight and in measure. It is wild and intractable in its nature; but Thou tamest it. It is blind and headlong in its impulse; but Thou directest it. It struggles continually to break its chain; but Thou confinest it; Thou retrenchest all the superfluity of its fury.—Let us now consider,
what

what improvement is to be made of this meditation on the ways of Providence.

IN the first place, Let it lead us to a religious contemplation of the hand of God in all the transactions of the world. In the ordinary course of human affairs, we behold a very mixed and busy scene; the passions of men variously agitated, and new changes daily taking place upon this stage of time. We behold peace and war alternately returning; the fortunes of private men rising and falling; and states and nations partaking of the same vicissitude. In all this, if we attend only to the operation of external causes, and to the mere rotation of events, we view no more than the inanimate part of nature; we stop at the surface of things; we contemplate the great spectacle which is presented to us, not with the eyes of rational and intelligent beings. The life and beauty of the universe arises from the view of that wisdom and goodness which animates and conducts the whole, and unites all the parts in one great design

There

There is an eternal Mind who puts all those wheels in motion ; Himself remaining for ever at rest. Nothing is void of God. Even in the passions and ragings of men, He is to be found ; and where they imagine they guide themselves, they are guided and controlled by his hand. What solemn thoughts and devout affections ought this meditation to inspire ; when, in viewing the affairs of the world, we attend not merely to the actings of men, but to the ways of God ; and consider ourselves, and all our concerns, as included in his high administration.

IN the second place, The doctrine which has been illustrated should prevent us from censuring Providence, on account of any seeming disorders and evils which at present take place in the world. The various instances which have been pointed out in this Discourse, of human passion and wickedness rendered subservient to wise and useful ends, give us the highest reason to conclude, that in all other cases of seeming evil, the like ends are carried

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Psalms
lxxvii. 19.

Job,
xxxv. 14.

carried on. This ought to satisfy our mind, even when the prospect is most dark and discouraging. The plans of Divine wisdom are too large and comprehensive to be discerned by us in all their extent; and where we see only by parts, we must frequently be at a loss in judging of the whole. *The way of God is in the sea, and his paths in the great waters; his footsteps are not known. But although thou sayest thou canst not see him, yet judgment is before him, therefore trust thou in him.* As in the natural world no real deformity is found, nothing but what has either some ornament or some use; so in the moral world, the most irregular and deformed appearances contribute, in one way or other, to the order of the whole. The Supreme Being, from the most opposite and disagreeing principles, forms universal concord; and adapts even the most harsh and dissonant notes to the harmony of his praise. As he hath reared the goodly frame of nature from various and jarring elements, and hath settled it in peace; so he hath formed such an union by his Providence

vidence of the more various interests, and more jarring passions of men, that they all conspire to his glory, and co-operate for general good.—How amazing is that wisdom, which comprehends such infinite diversities and contrarieties within its scheme! How powerful that hand, which bends to its own purpose the good and the bad, the busy and the idle, the friends and the foes of truth; which obliges them all to hold on their course to his glory, though divided from one another by a multiplicity of pursuits, and differing often from themselves; and while they all move at their own freedom, yet, by a secret influence, winds and turns them at his will! *O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!*

Rom. xi. 33.

IN the third place, We see, from what has been said, how much reason there is for submission to the decrees of Heaven. Whatever distresses we suffer from the *wrath of man*, we have ground to believe

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that they befall not in vain. In the midst of human violence or oppression, we are not left to be the sport of fortune. Higher counsels are concerned. Wise and good designs are going on. God is always carrying forward his own purposes; and if these terminate in his glory, which is ever the same with the felicity of the righteous, is not this a sufficient reason for our calm and cheerful acquiescence?

Hence also, to conclude, arises the most powerful argument for studying, with zealous assiduity, to gain the favour and protection of the Almighty. If his displeasure hang over our heads, all things around us may be just objects of terror. For, against him, there is no defence. The most violent powers in nature are ministers to him. Formidable, indeed, may prove the *wrath of man*, if he be pleased to let it forth against us. To him, but not to us, it belongs to restrain it at pleasure. Whereas, when we are placed under his protection, all human wrath is divested of its terrors. *If he be for us, who, or what, can be against us?* Let us pursue the
measures

measures which he hath appointed for obtaining his grace, by faith, repentance, and a holy life, and we shall have no reason to be *afraid of evil tidings; our hearts will be fixed, trusting in the Lord.* When the religious fear of God possesses the heart, it expels the ignoble fear of man, and becomes the principle of courage and magnanimity. The Lord is *a buckler and a shield* to them that serve him. *When he ariseth, his enemies shall be scattered as smoke is driven away, and as chaff before the wind. He giveth strength and victory to his people; he clotheth them with salvation. The wrath of man shall praise him, and the remainder of wrath shall he restrain.*

SERMON XV.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE TO MANKIND.

[Preached before the Society in Scotland for Propagating
Christian Knowledge.]

ISAIAH, xi. 9.

*They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my
holy mountain; for the earth shall be
full of the knowledge of the Lord, as
the waters cover the sea.*

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THIS passage of Scripture is understood, by all Christian interpreters, to refer to the days of the Gospel. The Prophet describes, in the context, the auspicious influence of the Messiah's reign, as extending over all nature, and producing universal felicity. The full accomplishment

ment of this prediction is yet future, and respects some more advanced period of the kingdom of God, when true religion shall universally prevail, and the native tendency of the Gospel attain its entire effect. In the prospect of this event the Prophet seems to rise above himself, and celebrates that happy age in the most sublime strain of Eastern poetry. He opens a beautiful view of the state of the world, as a state of returning innocence. He represents all nature flourishing in peace; discord and guile abolished; the most hostile natures reconciled, and the most savage reformed and tamed. *The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The lion shall eat straw like the ox; and the suckling child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.*

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Upon reading these words, we must immediately perceive the great encouragement which they give to all good designs for promoting religion in the world. When we engage in these, we have the comfort of being engaged, not only in a good cause, but also in one that shall undoubtedly be successful. For we are here assured by the Divine promise, that truth and righteousness shall at length prevail, and that the increasing influence of religion shall introduce general happiness. It is a pleasing and animating reflection, that, in carrying on such designs, we act upon the Divine plan; and co-operate with God for advancing the kingdom of the Messiah. We have no reason to be discouraged by any unfavourable circumstances which at present oppose our pious endeavours. Though the ignorance, superstition, and corruption, which now fill so great a part of the world, have a dark and mysterious aspect, it is not beyond the power of that Supreme Being, who brings light out of darkness, to clear up those perplexing appearances, and gradually to extricate mankind

mankind from the labyrinth of ignorance and error. Let us consider how improbable it seemed, when the Gospel was first published, that it should extend so far, and overthrow so much established superstition, as it has already done. There is nothing in the present state of the world, to render it more unlikely that it shall one day be universally received, and prevail in its full influence. At the rise of Christianity, the disproportion was, at least, as great between the apparent human causes, and the effect which has actually been produced, as there is in our age, between the circumstances of religion in the world, and the effect which we farther expect. *The Sun of righteousness* having already exerted its influence in breaking through the thickest darkness, we may justly hope, that it is powerful enough to dispel all remaining obscurity; and that it will ascend by degrees to that perfect day, when *healing shall be under its wings* to all the nations. *A little one shall become a thousand; and a small one a strong nation. I the Lord will hasten it in its time.*

Isai. lx. 22.

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BESIDES the prediction which the Text contains of the future success of religion, it points out also a precise connection between the increase of religious knowledge, and the happiness of mankind. *The knowledge of the Lord filling the earth*, is assigned as the cause why *they shall not hurt nor destroy in all the holy mountain of God*. To this I am now to lead your thoughts ; as a subject both suited to the occasion of the present meeting, and proper to be illustrated in times, wherein total indifference to religious principles appears to gain ground. Whether Christianity shall be propagated farther or not, is treated as a matter of no great concern to mankind. The opinion prevails among many, that moral virtue may subsist, with equal advantage, independent of religion. For moral principles great regard is professed ; but articles of religious belief are held to be abstract tenets, remote from life ; points of mere speculation and debate, the influence of which is very inconsiderable on the actions of men. The general conduct, it is contended, will always proceed upon views

views and principles which have more relation to the present state of things ; and religious knowledge can therefore stand in no necessary connection with their happiness and prosperity.—How adverse such opinions are, both to the profession and practice of religion, is abundantly evident. How adverse they are to the general welfare and real interests of mankind, I hope to make appear to candid minds.

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By the *knowledge of the Lord*, in the Text, is not to be understood the natural knowledge of God only. It is plain that the Prophet speaks of the age of the Messiah, when more enlarged discoveries should be made to mankind of the Divine perfections and government, than unassisted reason could attain. *The knowledge of the Lord*, therefore, comprehends the principles of Christianity, as well as of natural religion. In order to discern the importance of such knowledge to general happiness, we shall consider man, I. as an individual ; II. as a member of society.

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I. CONSIDERING man as an individual, let us inquire how far the knowledge of true religion is important, first, to his improvement; next, to his consolation.

FIRST, With respect to the improvement of man; the advancement of his nature in what is valuable and useful, the acquisition of such dispositions and habits as fit him for acting his part with propriety on this stage, and prepare him for a higher state of action hereafter; what benefit does he receive, in these respects, from religious knowledge and belief? It is obvious, that all increase of knowledge is improvement to the understanding. The more that its sphere is enlarged, the greater number of objects that are submitted to its view, especially when these objects are of intrinsic excellence, the more, must those rational powers, which are the glory of man, be in the course of attaining their proper strength and maturity. But were the knowledge of religion merely speculative, though the speculation must be admitted to be noble, yet less could be said

said of its importance. We recommend it to mankind, as forming the heart, and directing the life. Those pure and exalted conceptions which the Christian religion has taught us to entertain of the Deity, as the universal Father and righteous Governour of the universe, the Standard of unspotted perfection; *and the Author of every good and perfect gift*; conducting his whole administration with an eternal regard to order, virtue, and truth; ever favouring the cause, and supporting the interests, of righteous men; and applying, in this direction, the whole might of omnipotence, and the whole council of unerring wisdom, from the beginning to the end of things; such conceptions both kindle devotion, and strengthen virtue. They give fortitude to the mind in the practice of righteousness, and establish the persuasion of its being our highest interest.

All the doctrines peculiar to the Gospel are great improvements on what the light of nature had imperfectly suggested. A high dispensation of Providence is made known, particularly suited to the exigencies

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cies of man ; calculated for recovering him from that corrupted state into which experience bears witness that he is fallen, and for restoring him to integrity, and favour with his Creator. The method of carrying on this great plan is such as gives us the most striking views of the importance of righteousness or virtue, and of the high account in which it stands with God. The Son of God appeared on the earth, and suffered as a propitiation for the sins of the world, with this express intention, that he might *bring in everlasting righteousness* ; that he might *purge our consciences from dead works to serve the living God* ; that he might *redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works*. Such a merciful interposition of the Creator of the world, while it illustriously displays his goodness, and signalizes his concern for the moral interests of mankind, affords us, at the same time, the most satisfying ground of confidence and trust. It offers an object to the mind on which it can lay hold for the security of its future hopes ; when, with a certainty
far

far beyond what any abstract argument could yield, it appeals to a distinguished fact; and is enabled to say, *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*

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Romans,
viii. 32.

While the Divine government is thus placed in a light the most amiable, and most encouraging to every virtuous mind, there is, at the same time, something extremely awful and solemn in the whole doctrine of redemption. It is calculated to strike the mind with reverence for the Divine administration. It points at some deep malignity in sin, at some dreadful consequences flowing from guilt, unknown in their causes and in their whole effects to us, which moved the Sovereign of the world to depart from the ordinary course of Providence, and to bring about the restoration of his fallen creatures by a method so astonishing. Mankind are hereby awakened to the most serious reflections. Such views are opened of the sanctity of the Divine laws, of the strictness of the Divine justice, of the importance of the

part

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part which is assigned them to act, as serve to prevent their trifling with human life, and add dignity and solemnity to virtue. These great purposes are farther carried on, by the discovery which is made of the fixed connection in which this life stands with a future eternal state. We are represented as *sowing now, what we are to reap* hereafter; undergoing a course of probation and trial, which, according as it terminates in our improvement, or leaves us unreformed and corrupted, will dismiss us to lasting abodes, either of punishment or reward. Such a discovery rises far above the dubious conjectures, and uncertain reasonings, which mere natural light suggests concerning the future condition of mankind. Here we find, what alone can produce any considerable influence on practice, explicit promise and threatening; an authoritative sanction given to a law; the Governour and Judge revealed; and all the motives which can operate on hope and fear, brought home to the heart, with, *Thus saith the Lord of Hosts*. In a word, a great and magnificent

magnificent plan of Divine administration is opened to us in the Gospel of Christ; and nothing is omitted that can impress mankind with the persuasion of their being all, in the strictest sense, subjects of the moral government of God.

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THOUGH the bounds of this Discourse allow us to take only an imperfect view of the principles of Christian doctrine, yet the hints which have been given, lay a sufficient foundation for appealing to every impartial mind, whether the knowledge and belief of such principles be not intimately connected with the improvement, and, by consequence, with the happiness of man? I reason now with such as admit, that virtue is the great source both of improvement and happiness. Let them lay what stress they please upon the authority of conscience, and upon the force and evidence of its dictates; can they refuse to allow that the natural tendency of the principles which I have mentioned, is to support those dictates, and to confirm that authority; to excite, on
various

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various occasions, the most useful sentiments; to provide additional restraints from vice, and additional motives to every virtue? Who dares pronounce, that there is no case in which conscience stands in need of such assistance to direct, where there is so much uncertainty and darkness; and to prompt, where there is so much feebleness and irresolution, and such a fatal proneness to vice and folly?

But how good soever the tendency of religious principles may be, some will still call in question their actual significancy, and influence on life. This tendency is by various causes defeated. Between the belief of religious principles and a correspondent practice, it will be alleged that frequent experience shows there is no necessary connection; and that therefore the propagation of the one, cannot give us any assurance of proportionable improvements following in the other.—This, in part, is granted to be true; as we admit that religious knowledge and belief are susceptible of various degrees, before they arrive

arrive at that real Christian faith which the Scripture represents as *purifying the heart*. But though the connection between principle and practice be not necessary and invariable, it will not, I suppose, be denied, that there is some connection. Here then one avenue to the heart is opened. If the tendency of Religious Knowledge be good, wisdom must direct, and duty oblige us to cultivate it. For tendency will, at least in some cases, rise into effect; and, probably, in more cases than are known and observed by the world. Besides the distinguished examples of true religion and virtue, which have, more or less, adorned every age of the Christian æra, what numbers may there be, in the more silent and private scenes of life, overlooked by superficial observers of mankind, on whose hearts and lives religious principles have the most happy influence? Even on loose and giddy minds, where they are far from accomplishing their full effect, their influence is, frequently, not altogether lost. Impressions of religion often check vice in its career. They pre-

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vent it from proceeding its utmost length; and though they do not entirely reform the offender, they serve to maintain order in society. Persons who are now bad, might probably have been worse without them, and the world have suffered more from unrestrained licentiousness. They often sow latent seeds of goodness in the heart, which proper circumstances and occasions afterwards ripen; though the reformation of the offender may not be so conspicuous as his former enormities have been. From the native tendency of religious belief, there is reason to conclude, that those good effects of it are not so rare as some would represent them. By its nature and tendency, we can better judge of its effects, than by observations drawn from a supposed experience, which often is narrow in its compass, and fallacious in its conclusions.

The actual influence of principle and belief of mankind, admits of clear illustration from uncontested matter of fact. They who hold the good effects of Christian principles to be so inconsiderable, as
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to render the propagation of them of small importance, will be at no loss to give us instances of corrupt principles of belief having had the most powerful influence on the world. Loud complaints we hear from this quarter of the direful effects which superstition and enthusiasm have produced; of their having poisoned the tempers, and transformed the manners, of men; of their having overcome the strongest restraints of law, of reason, and humanity. Is this then the case, that all principles, except good ones, are of such mighty energy? Strange! that false religion should be able to do so much, and true religion so little; that belief, so powerful in the one case, should be so impotent in the other.—No impartial inquirer, surely, can entertain this opinion. The whole history of mankind shows that their religious tenets and principles, of whatever nature they be, are of great influence in forming their character, and directing their conduct. The mischief which false principles have done, affords a good argument to guard carefully against error;

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but as it is a proof of what belief can do, it gives ground to hope the more from it, when rightly directed. 'The same torrent which, when it is put out of its natural course, overflows and lays waste a country, adorns and enriches it, when running in its proper channel. If it be alleged that superstition is likely to be more powerful in its effects than truth, because it agrees better with the follies and corruptions of the world, we may oppose to this, on the other hand, that truth has the Divine blessing and the countenance of Heaven on its side. Let us always hope well of a cause that is good in itself, and beneficial to mankind. Truth is mighty, and will prevail. Let us spread *the incorruptible seed* as widely as we can, and trust in God that he will give the increase.— Having thus shown the importance of Religious Knowledge to mankind in the way of improvement, let us,

IN the second place, Consider it in the light of consolation ; as bringing aid and relief to us amidst the distresses of life.

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Here religion incontestably triumphs; and its happy effects, in this respect, furnish a strong argument to every benevolent mind for wishing them to be farther diffused throughout the world. For without the belief and hope afforded by Divine Revelation, the circumstances of man are extremely forlorn. He finds himself placed here as a stranger in a vast universe, where the powers and operations of Nature are very imperfectly known; where both the beginnings and the issues of things are involved in mysterious darkness; where he is unable to discover, with any certainty, whence he sprung, or for what purpose he was brought into this state of existence; whether he be subjected to the government of a mild, or of a wrathful ruler; what construction he is to put on many of the dispensations of his providence; and what his fate is to be when he departs hence. What a disconsolate situation to a serious inquiring mind! The greater degree of virtue it possesses, its sensibility is likely to be the more oppressed by this burden of labouring thought.



Even though it were in one's power to banish all uneasy thought, and to fill up the hours of life with perpetual amusement, life so filled up would, upon reflection, appear poor and trivial. But these are far from being the terms upon which man is brought into this world. He is conscious that his being is frail and feeble; he sees himself beset with various dangers; and is exposed to many a melancholy apprehension, from the evils which he may have to encounter, before he arrives at the close of life. In this distressed condition, to reveal to him such discoveries of the Supreme Being, as the Christian religion affords, is to reveal to him a Father and a Friend; is to let in a ray of the most cheering light upon the darkness of the human estate. He who was before a destitute orphan, wandering in the inhospitable desert, has now gained a shelter from the bitter and inclement blast. He now knows to whom to pray, and in whom to trust; where to unbosom his sorrows, and from what hand to look for relief.

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It is certain that when the heart bleeds from some wound of recent misfortune, nothing is of equal efficacy with religious comfort. It is of power to enlighten the darkest hour, and to assuage the severest woe, by the belief of Divine favour, and the prospect of a blessed immortality. In such hopes the mind expatiates with joy; and when bereaved of its earthly friends, solaces itself with the thoughts of one Friend, who will never forsake it. Refined reasonings concerning the nature of the human condition, and the improvement which philosophy teaches us to make of every event, may entertain the mind when it is at ease; may perhaps contribute to sooth it when slightly touched with sorrow. But when it is torn with any sore distress, they are cold and feeble, compared with a direct promise from the word of God. *This is an anchor to the soul both sure and stedfast.* This has given consolation and refuge to many a virtuous heart, at a time when the most cogent reasonings would have proved utterly unavailing.

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Upon the approach of death, especially when, if a man thinks at all, his anxiety about his future interests must naturally increase, the power of religious consolation is sensibly felt. Then appears, in the most striking light, the high value of the discoveries made by the Gospel; not only life and immortality revealed, but a Mediator with God discovered; mercy proclaimed, through him, to the frailties of the penitent and the humble; and his presence promised to be with them when they are passing through *the valley of the shadow of death*, in order to bring them safe into unseen habitations of rest and joy. Here is ground for their leaving the world with comfort and peace. But in this severe and trying period, this labouring hour of nature, how shall the unhappy man support himself, who knows not, or believes not, the discoveries of religion? Secretly conscious to himself that he has not acted his part as he ought to have done, the sins of his past life arise before him in sad remembrance. He wishes to exist after death, and yet dreads that existence.

istence. The Governour of the world is unknown. He cannot tell whether every endeavour to obtain his mercy may not be vain. All is awful obscurity around him; and in the midst of endless doubts and perplexities, the trembling, reluctant soul is forced away from the body. As the misfortunes of life must, to such a man, have been most oppressive, so its end is bitter. His sun sets in a dark cloud; and the night of death closes over his head, full of misery.—Having now shown how important *the Knowledge of the Lord* is, both to the improvement and the consolation of man, considered as an individual, I am next to show,

II. How important this Knowledge is to him as a member of society. This branch of the subject is in part anticipated by what has been said. For all the improvement which man receives as an individual, redounds to the benefit of the public. Society reaps the fruit of the virtues of all the members who compose it; and in
proportion

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proportion as each, apart, is made better, the whole must flourish.

But, besides this effect, Religious Knowledge has a direct tendency to improve the social intercourse of men, and to assist them in co-operating for common good. It is the great instrument of civilizing the multitude, and forming them to union. It tames the fierceness of their passions, and softens the rudeness of their manners. There is much reason to doubt whether any regular society ever subsisted, or could subsist, in the world, destitute of all religious ideas and principles. They who, in early times, attempted to bring the wandering and scattered tribes of men from the woods, and to unite them in cities and communities, always found it necessary to begin with some institution of religion. The wisest legislators of old, through the whole progress of their systems of government, considered religion as essential to civil polity. If even those imperfect forms of it, loaded with so much superstition and error, were important to the welfare
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of society, how much more that reasonable worship of the true God, which is taught by the Gospel? True religion introduces the idea of regular subjection, by accustoming mankind to the awe of superiour power in the Deity, joined with the veneration of superiour wisdom and goodness. It is by its nature an associating principle; and creates new and sacred bonds of union among men. Common assemblies for religious worship, and joint homage offered up to one God; the sense of being all dependent on the same protection, and bound to duty by the same ties, sharers in the same benefits of Heaven, and expectants of the same reward, tend to awaken the sentiments of friendly relation, and to confirm and strengthen our mutual connexion. The doctrine of Christianity is most adverse to all tyranny and oppression, but highly favourable to the interests of good government among men. It represses the spirit of licentiousness and sedition. It inculcates the duty of subordination to lawful superiours. It requires us to *fear God, to honour the king, and*
not

not to meddle with them that are given to change.

Religious Knowledge forwards all useful and ornamental improvements in society. Experience shows, that in proportion as it diffuses its light, learning flourishes, and liberal arts are cultivated and advanced. Just conceptions of religion promote a free and manly spirit. They lead men to think for themselves; to form their principles upon fair inquiry, and not to resign their conscience to the dictates of men. Hence they naturally inspire aversion to slavery of every kind; and promote a taste for liberty and laws. Despotic governments have generally taken the firmest root among nations that were blinded by Mahometan or Pagan darkness; where the throne of violence has been supported by ignorance and false religion. In the Christian world, during those centuries in which gross superstition held its reign undisturbed, oppression and slavery were in its train. The cloud of ignorance sat thick and deep over the nations; and the world was threatened with a relapse into
into

into ancient barbarity. As soon as the true *Knowledge of the Lord* revived, at the auspicious æra of the Reformation, learning, liberty, and arts, began to shine forth with it, and to resume their lustre.

But the happy influence which religion exerts on society, extends much farther than to effects of this kind. It is not only subsidiary to the improvement, but necessary to the preservation of society. It is the very basis on which it rests. Religious principle is what gives men the surest hold of one another. That last and greatest pledge of veracity, an oath, without which no society could subsist, derives its whole authority from an established reverence of God, to whom it is a solemn appeal. Banish religious principle, and you loosen all the bonds which connect mankind together; you shake the fundamental pillar of mutual confidence and trust; you render the security arising from laws, in a great measure, void and ineffectual. For human laws and human sanctions cannot extend to numberless cases, in which the safety of mankind is deeply concerned. They would
prove

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prove very feeble instruments of order and peace, if there were no checks upon the conduct of men from the sense of Divine legislation; if no belief of future rewards and punishments were to overawe conscience, and to supply the defects of human government.

Indeed, the belief of religion is of such importance to public welfare, that the most expressive description we could give of a society of men in the utmost disorder, would be to say that there was no fear of God left among them. Imagination would immediately conceive them as abandoned to rapine and violence, to perfidy and treachery; as deceiving and deceived, oppressing and oppressed; consumed by intestine broils, and ripe for becoming a prey to the first invader. On the other hand, in order to form the idea of a society flourishing in its highest glory, we need only conceive the belief of Christian principle exerting its full influence on the hearts and lives of all the members. Instantly, the most amiable scene would open to our view. We should see the
causes

causes of public disunion removed, when men were animated with that noble spirit of love and charity which our religion breathes; and formed to the pursuit of those higher interests, which give no occasion to competition and jealousy. We should see families, neighbourhoods, and communities, living in unbroken amity, and pursuing, with one heart and mind, the common interest; sobriety of manners, and simplicity of life, restored; virtuous industry carrying on its useful labours, and cheerful contentment every where reigning. Politicians may lay down what plans they please for advancing public prosperity; but, in truth, it is the prevalency of such principles of religion and virtue which forms the strength and glory of a nation. When these are totally wanting, no measures contrived by human wisdom can supply the defect. In proportion as they prevail, they raise the state of society from that sad degeneracy into which it is at present sunk, and carry it forward, under the blessing of Heaven, towards that happy period, when *nation shall not lift up their sword*

sword against nation, nor learn war any more.

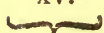
In order to prove the importance of Religious Knowledge to the interest of society, one consideration more, deserving particular attention, remains to be mentioned. It is, that if *good sense* be not sown in the field, *tares* will infallibly spring up. The propension towards religion is strong in the human heart. There is a natural preparation in our minds for receiving some impressions of supernatural belief. Upon these, among ignorant and uncultivated men, superstition or enthusiasm never fail to graft themselves. Into what monstrous forms these have shot forth, and what various mischiefs they have produced to society, is too well known. Nor is this the whole of the danger. Designing men are always ready to take advantage of this popular weakness, and to direct the superstitious bias of the multitude to their own ambitious and interested ends. Superstition, in itself a formidable evil, threatens consequences still more formidable, when it is rendered the tool of design and craft.

Hence

Hence arises one of the most powerful arguments for propagating with zeal, as far as our influence can extend, the pure and undefiled doctrines of the Gospel of Christ; in order that just and rational principles of religion may fill up that room in the minds of men, which dangerous fanaticism will otherwise usurp.

This consideration alone is sufficient to show the high utility of the design undertaken by the Society for propagating Christian Knowledge. With great propriety, they have bestowed their chief attention on a remote quarter of our country, where, from a variety of causes, ignorance and superstition had gained more ground, than in any other corner of the land; where the inhabitants, by their local situation, were more imperfectly supplied with the means of proper education and instruction, and at the same time exposed to the seductions of such as sought to pervert them from the truth. The laudable endeavours of this Society, in diffusing religious

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and useful knowledge through this part of the country, have already been crowned with much success; and more is still to be expected from the continuance of their pious and well-directed attention.

With such good designs, it becomes all to co-operate, who are lovers of mankind. Thus shall they show their just sense of the value of that blessing which they enjoy, in the knowledge of the Gospel of Christ; and their gratitude to Heaven for conferring it upon them. Thus shall they make the blessings of those who are now ready to *perish through lack of knowledge*, descend upon their heads. Thus shall they contribute their endeavours for bringing forward that happy period, foretold by ancient prophecy; when *there shall be one Lord over all the earth, and his name one*; when that name shall be *great from the rising to the setting sun*; when *there shall be nothing to hurt nor destroy in all the holy mountain of God*; but *judgment shall dwell in the wilderness*,
and

Zech.
xiv. 9.

Malachi,
i. 11.

Isaiah,
xxii. 16.

and righteousness remain in the fruitful field; the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose; and the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

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Isaiah,
xxiv. 1.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.



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